



THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

YVES SENTÉ • TEUN BERSERIK • PETER VAN DONGEN

THE VALLEY OF THE IMMORTALS

PART 2



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THE VALLEY OF THE IMMORTALS

THE THOUSANDTH ARM OF THE MEKONG

SCRIPT: YVES SENTÉ
ARTWORK: TEUN BERSERIK & PETER VAN DONGEN



COLOURS: PETER VAN DONGEN

TO THE MEMORY OF ALEXIS DRAGONETTI,
OUR FRIEND FOR EVER
THE AUTHORS AND THE PUBLISHER

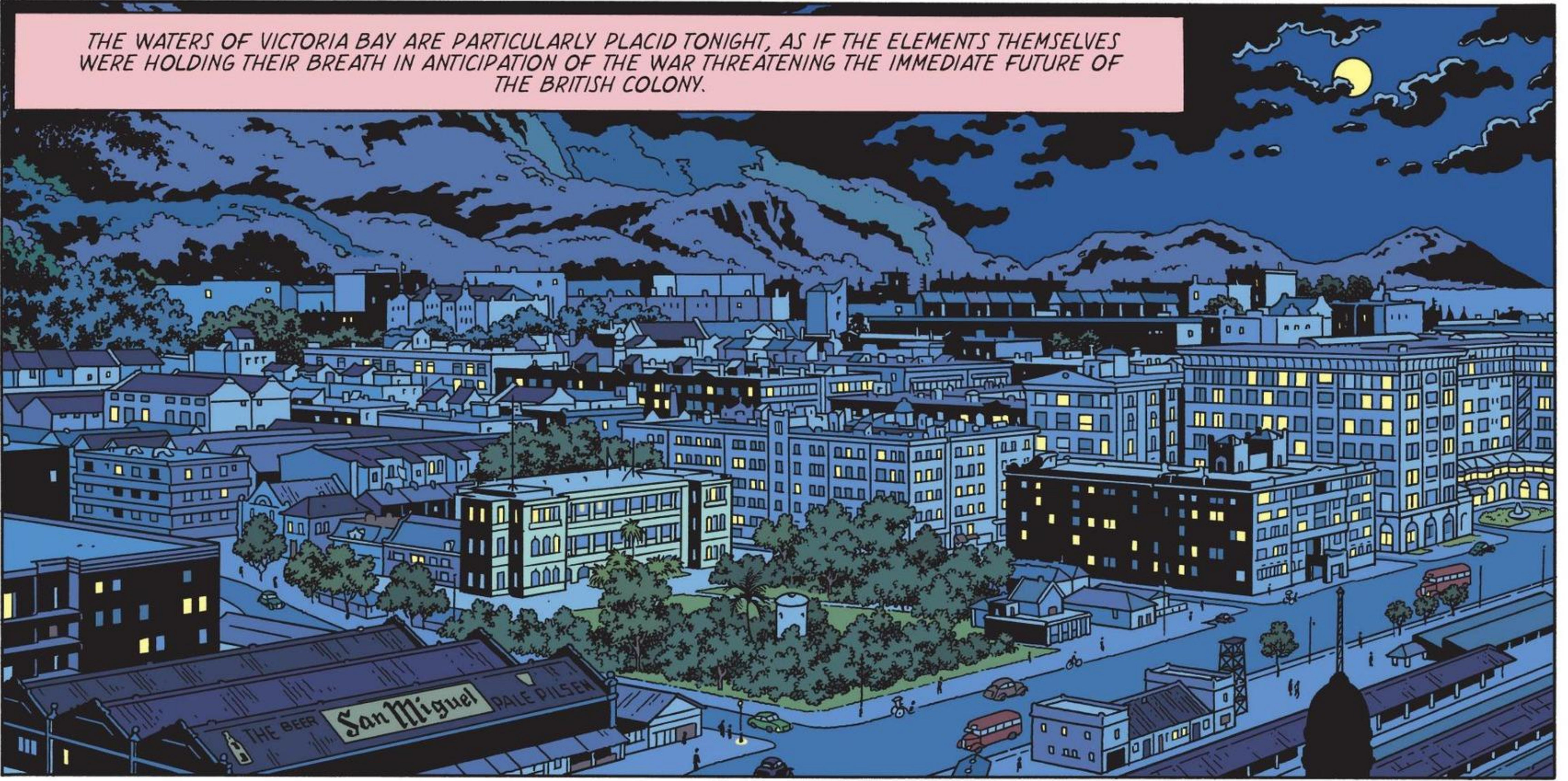
Thank you to my Dutch colleague Erik Kriek for letting me use his scanner.
And thank you to Teun, Yves, and the Dargaud team.
PETER

To fit better with the setting of *Blake and Mortimer*, we chose to use the Wade-Giles Romanisation system, which has now been mostly replaced by China's official system, Pinyin. Therefore, don't be alarmed if some names seem different to what you're used to!
CINEBOOK

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THE WATERS OF VICTORIA BAY ARE PARTICULARLY PLACID TONIGHT, AS IF THE ELEMENTS THEMSELVES WERE HOLDING THEIR BREATH IN ANTICIPATION OF THE WAR THREATENING THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE OF THE BRITISH COLONY.



IN THE MARINE POLICE HEADQUARTERS, THE LIGHT IS STILL ON IN THE OFFICE OF CHIEF INSPECTOR IAN FLAGSTAFF.

... Yes ... Of course ...



Continue searching, Sergeant.



I'm sorry, Captain. Still no trace of Professor Mortimer.

This makes no sense! I arrived at the Old Peak Café barely half an hour after him. The owner assured me he'd gone out to the terrace with that Tieh Han fellow ...



... who, as we know, lied to the professor when he invited Mortimer to meet his master, Dr Sun Sun-i—since this same Tieh Han himself had notified the police, as soon as he got off the boat in Hong Kong, that his master and his head of security Miss T'i-lan had disappeared during the crossing.*



If Tieh Han and his accomplices did kidnap Mortimer, though, they cannot have left British soil in such a short time!



I had security increased at every border post as soon as I received your call. All suspicious boats and land vehicles leaving the colony are being searched. There's still hope.



Hello? ... What?! ... Are you absolutely sure, Sergeant? ... Excellent! Go with the ambulance — I'll meet you at the hospital!



*SEE THE FIRST PART, THREAT OVER HONG KONG.

News of the professor?

Not of him, no, but a Marine Police patrol found Dr Sun Sun-i and his head of security on a tiny, rocky island at the north-eastern edge of our territorial waters. They were exhausted and dehydrated, but alive.

My men are bringing them directly to Hong Kong, where an ambulance will take them to Victoria Hospital. Let's go!

DAWN HASN'T BROKEN YET AS CHIEF INSPECTOR FLAGSTAFF'S LAUNCH TAKES BLAKE OVER THE BAY'S DARK WATERS. LITTLE DO THE TWO MEN SUSPECT THAT A FEW HUNDRED YARDS BEHIND THEM ...

... THE STRANGE MR CHASE – IN REALITY COLONEL OLRİK – IS GETTING READY TO LEAVE THE PENINSULA HOTEL WITH PROFESSOR MORTIMER TIED UP IN THE BOOT OF HIS VEHICLE.

THE IMPOSTOR TURNS HIS CAR NORTH AND DRIVES ...

... TO THE BORDER WITH CHINA.

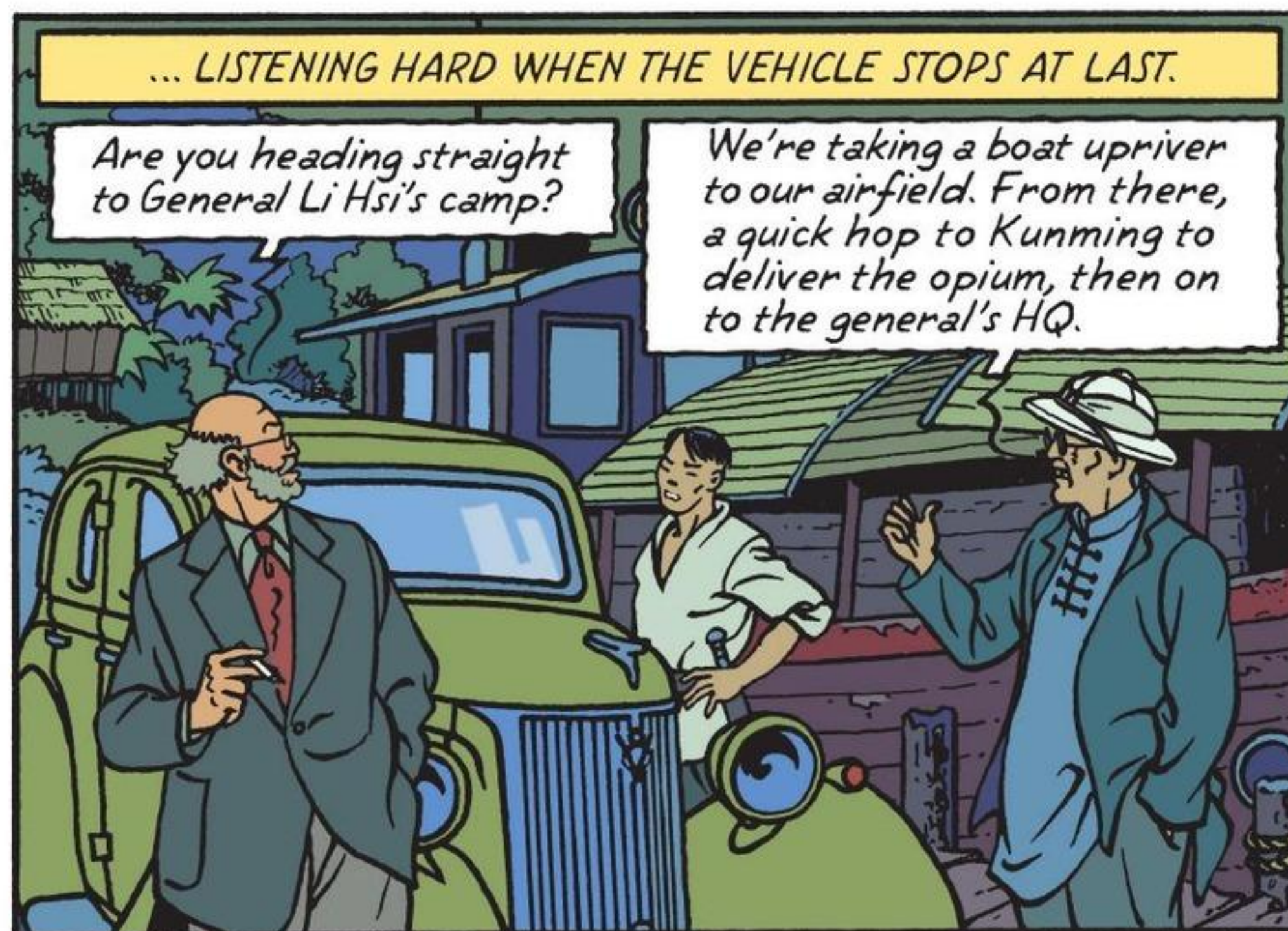
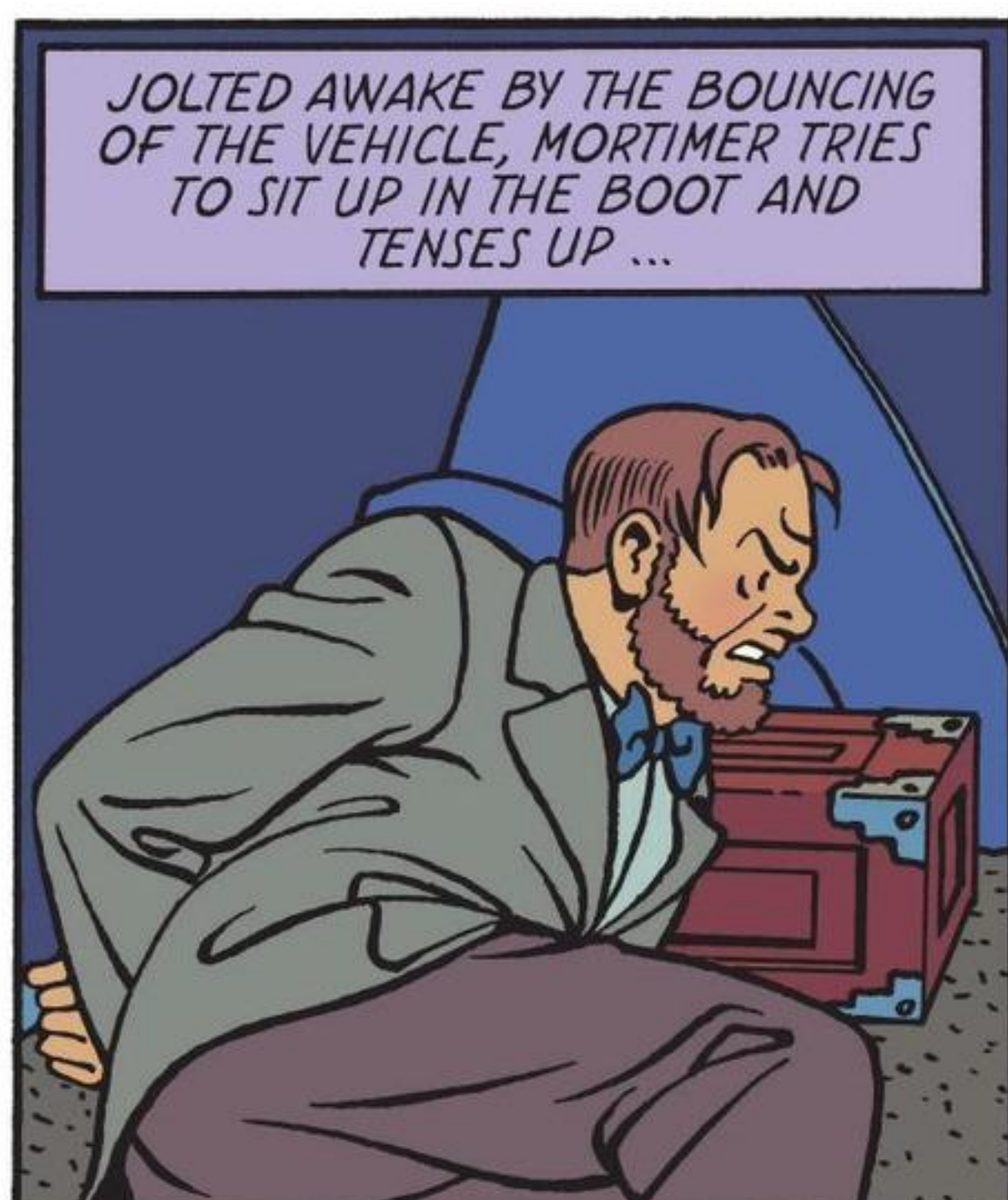
Your pass is in order, sir. I suggest you be careful, though. Those Communist rebels are in the process of surrounding our territory with armour ...

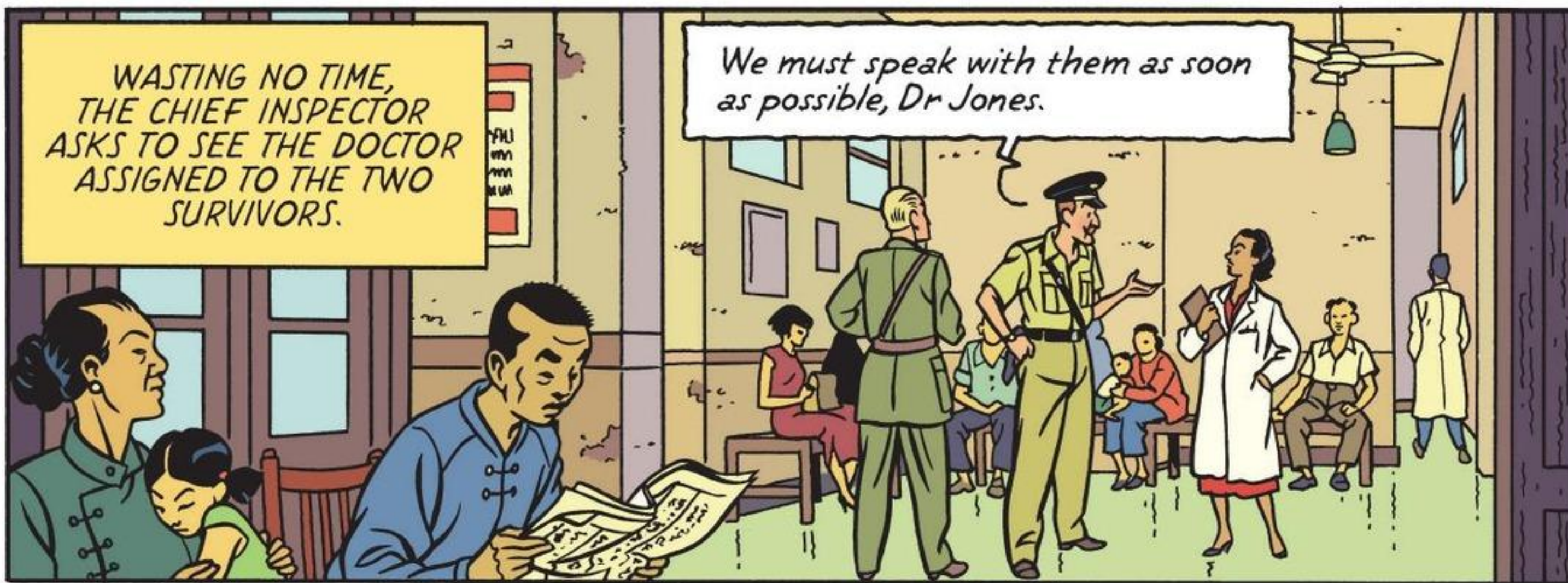
Don't worry, Sergeant. I won't be going far. I just need to get some information from one of my contacts among those dirty Reds, and I'll be right back.

IN THE MEANTIME, THE PAIR RESCUED BY THE MARINE POLICE HAVE ARRIVED AT THE STAR FERRY PIER IN HONG KONG ...

... WHERE AN AMBULANCE AWAITS ...

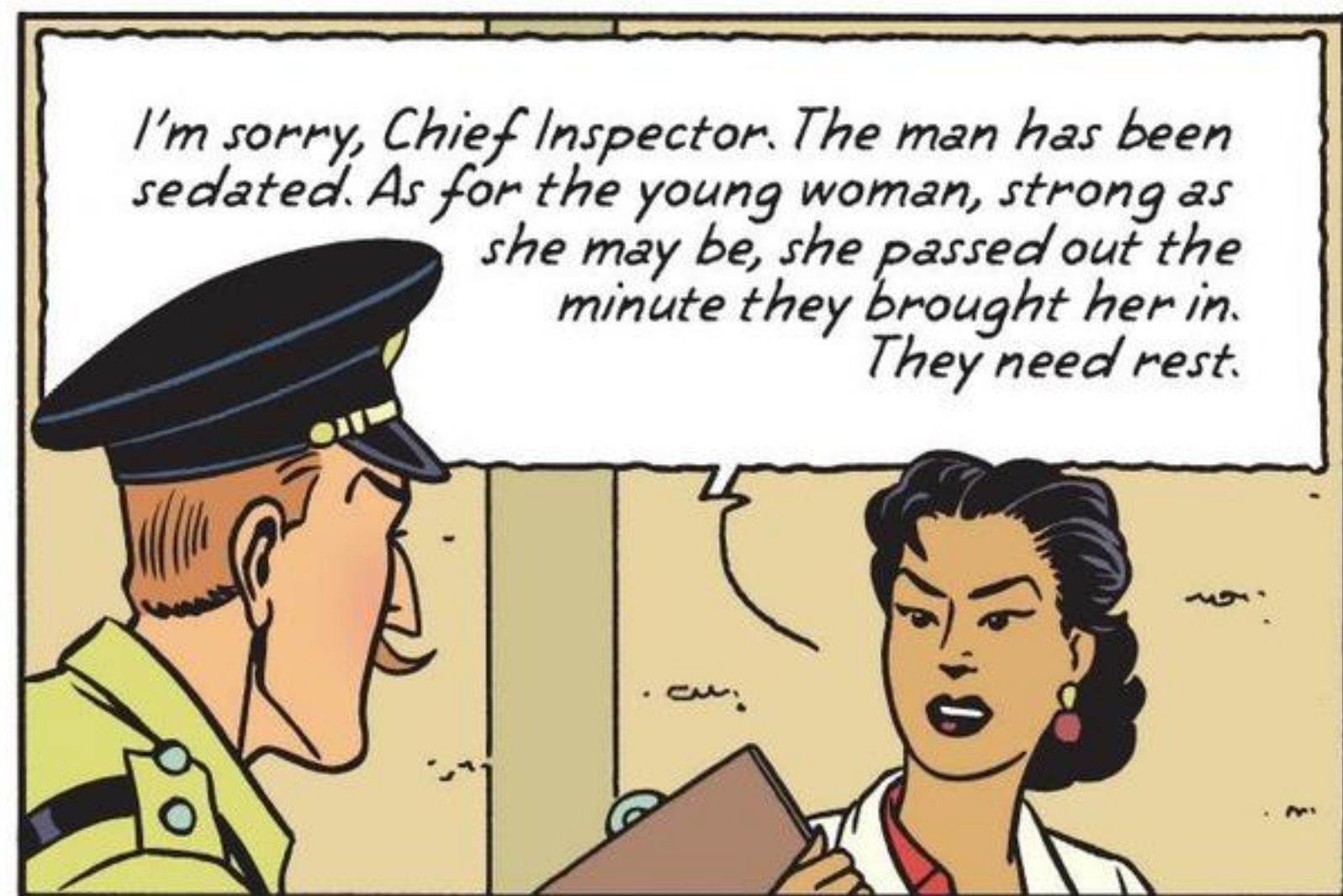
... AND IS SOON BARRELLING UP THE HILL LEADING TO VICTORIA HOSPITAL.





WASTING NO TIME, THE CHIEF INSPECTOR ASKS TO SEE THE DOCTOR ASSIGNED TO THE TWO SURVIVORS.

We must speak with them as soon as possible, Dr Jones.



I'm sorry, Chief Inspector. The man has been sedated. As for the young woman, strong as she may be, she passed out the minute they brought her in. They need rest.

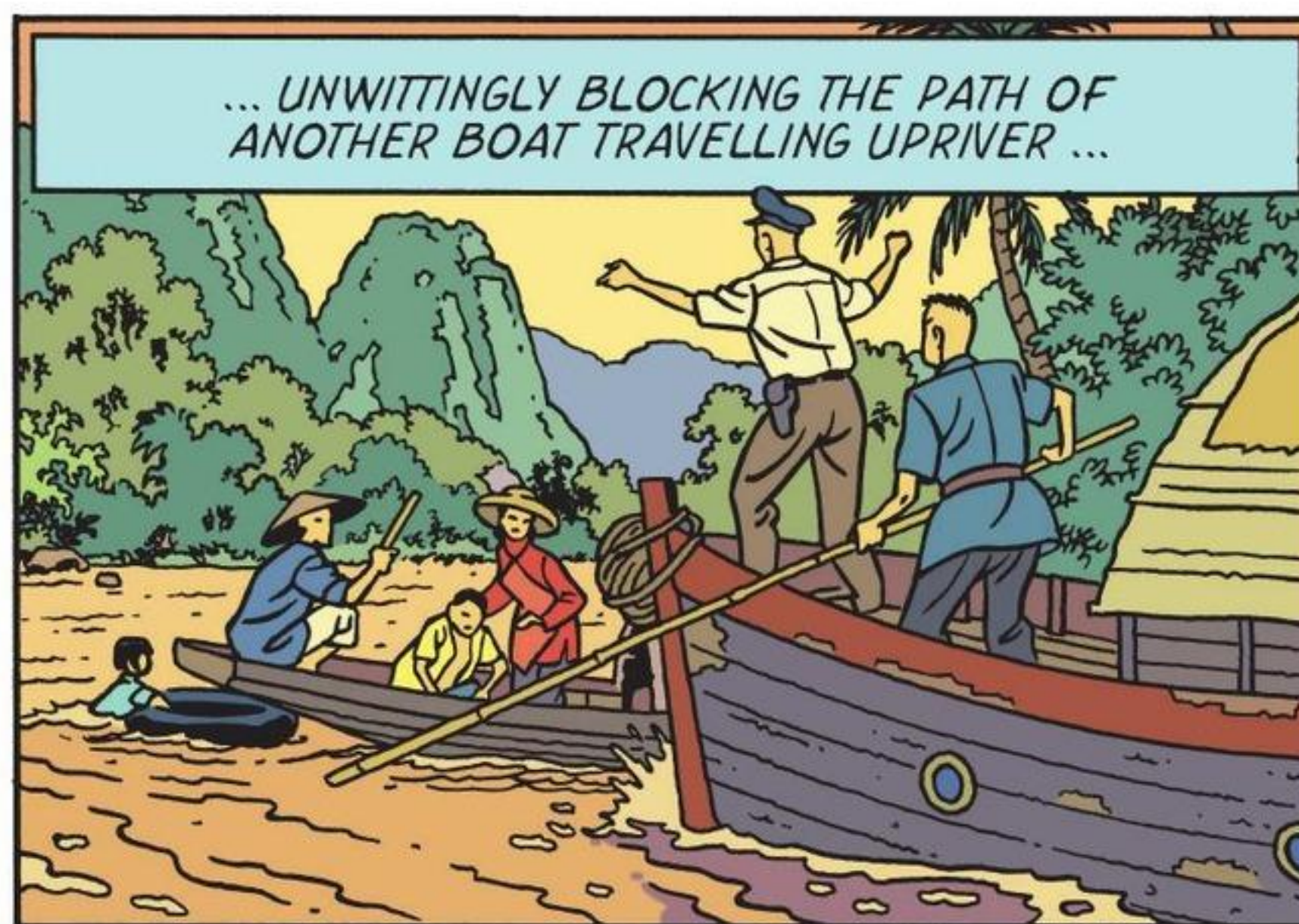


AT THAT INSTANT, ON THE PEARL RIVER, SEVERAL MILES UPSTREAM FROM HONG KONG ...

There! Look! I see two! Get us closer!



DEFTLY MANOEUVRING DESPITE THE CURRENT, THE OLD BOATMAN MANAGES TO STEADY HIS SKIFF IN FRONT OF THE NEARLY EXHAUSTED CHILDREN ...



... UNWITTINGLY BLOCKING THE PATH OF ANOTHER BOAT TRAVELLING UPRIVER ...



... WHICH CANNOT AVOID A COLLISION.

BAAAAAMM?!?

Huh?! What's happening? ...

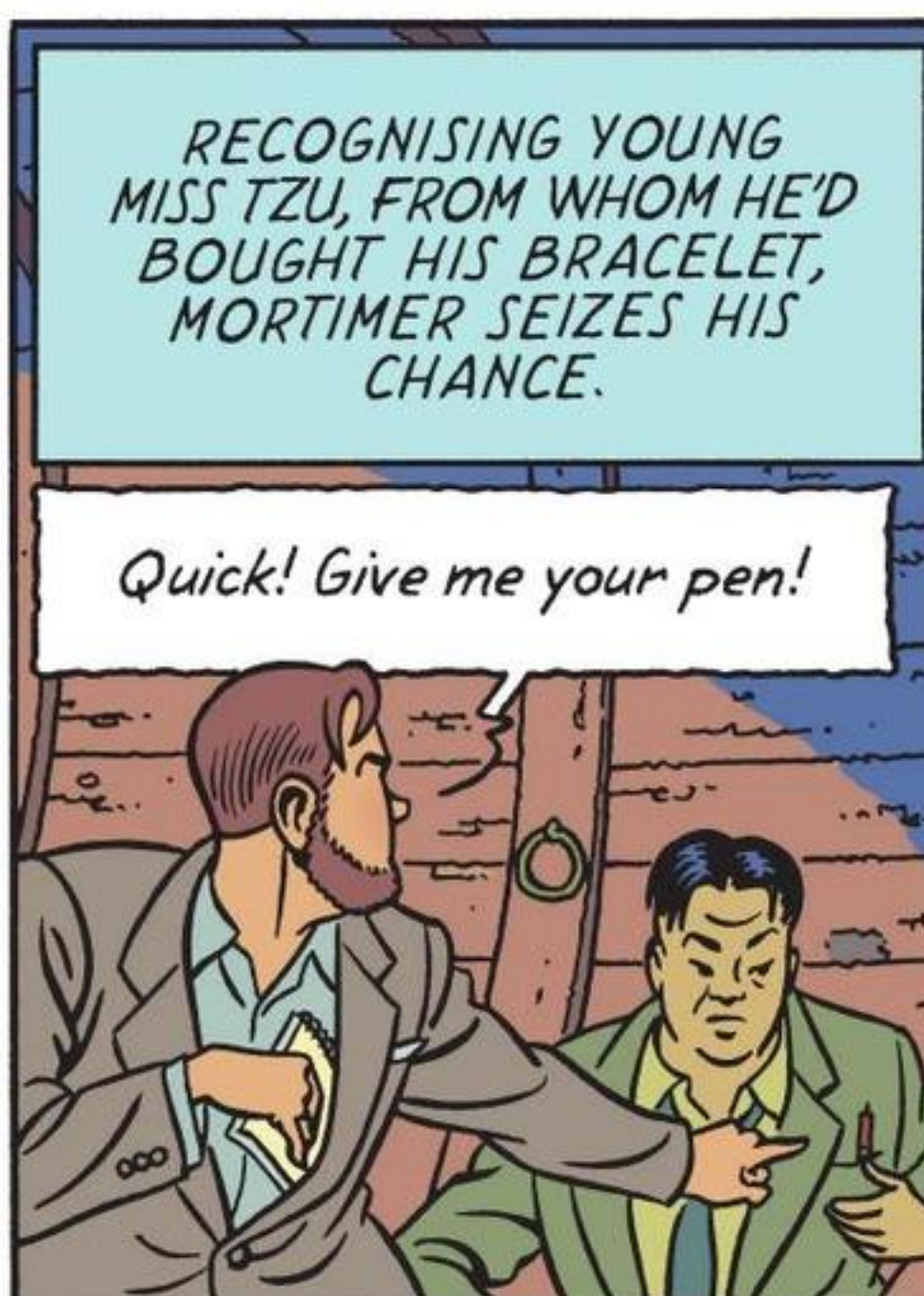


By all the gods! We're going to sink!

Calm down. Our boat merely bumped into that—

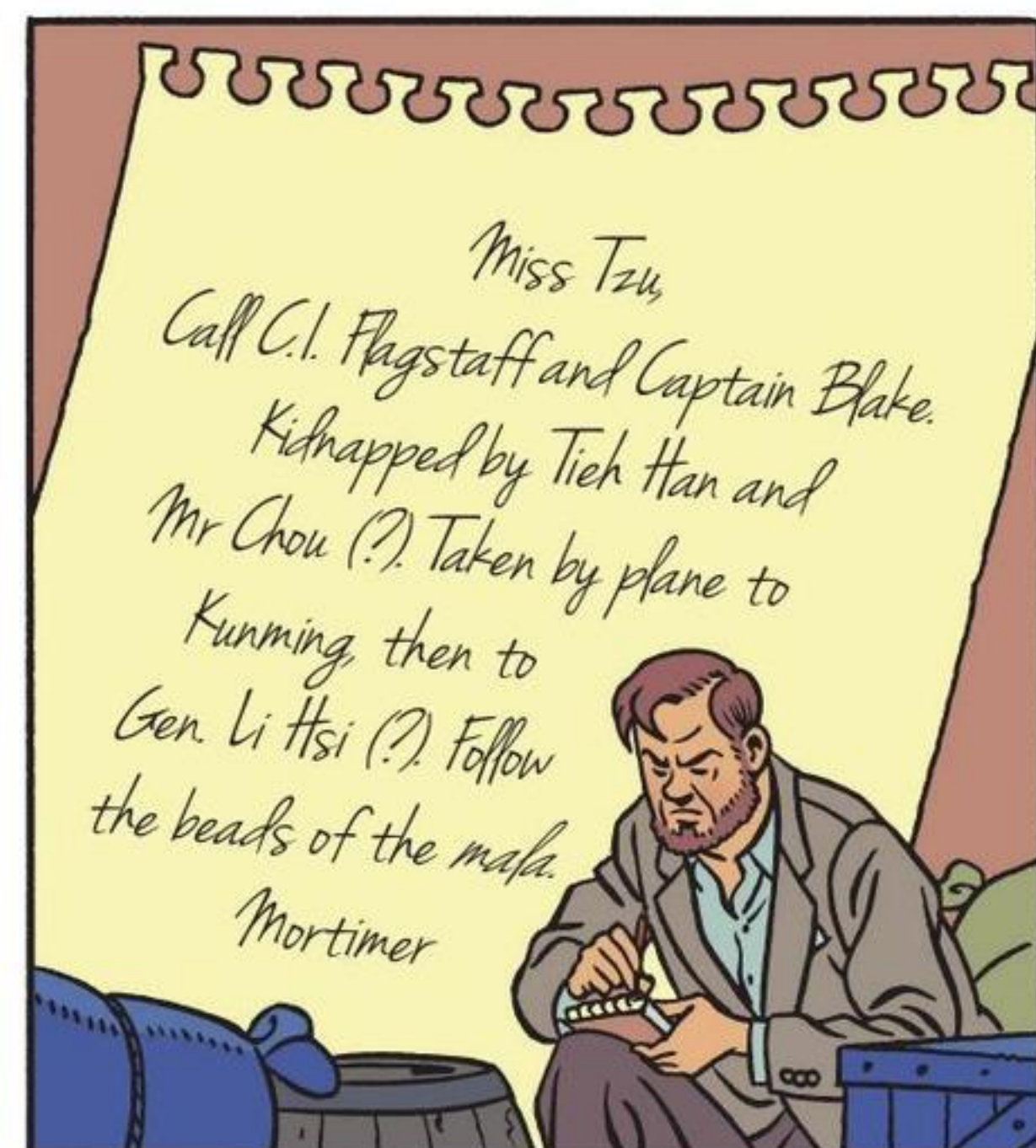


Goodness me?!?



RECOGNISING YOUNG MISS TZU, FROM WHOM HE'D BOUGHT HIS BRACELET, MORTIMER SEIZES HIS CHANCE.

Quick! Give me your pen!



Miss Tzu,
Call C.I. Flagstaff and Captain Blake.
Kidnapped by Tieh Han and
Mr Chou (?). Taken by plane to
Kunming, then to
Gen. Li Hsi (?). Follow
the beads of the mala.
Mortimer



THEN MORTIMER REMOVES A WOODEN BEAD FROM HIS MALA, WRAPS THE PAPER TIGHTLY AROUND IT AND, AT THE LAST SECOND ...

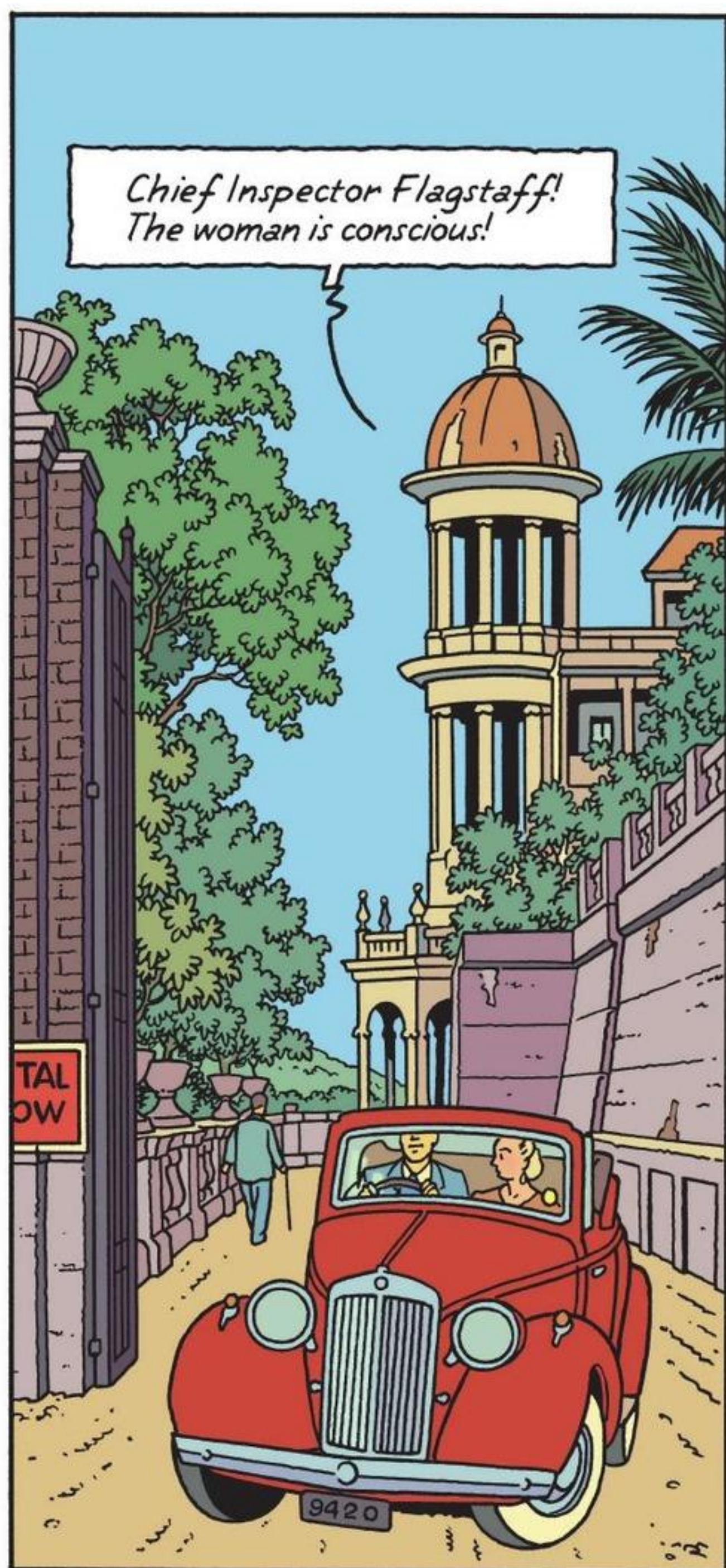


... MANAGES TO THROW IT INTO YOUNG MISS TZU'S SKIFF.



POK

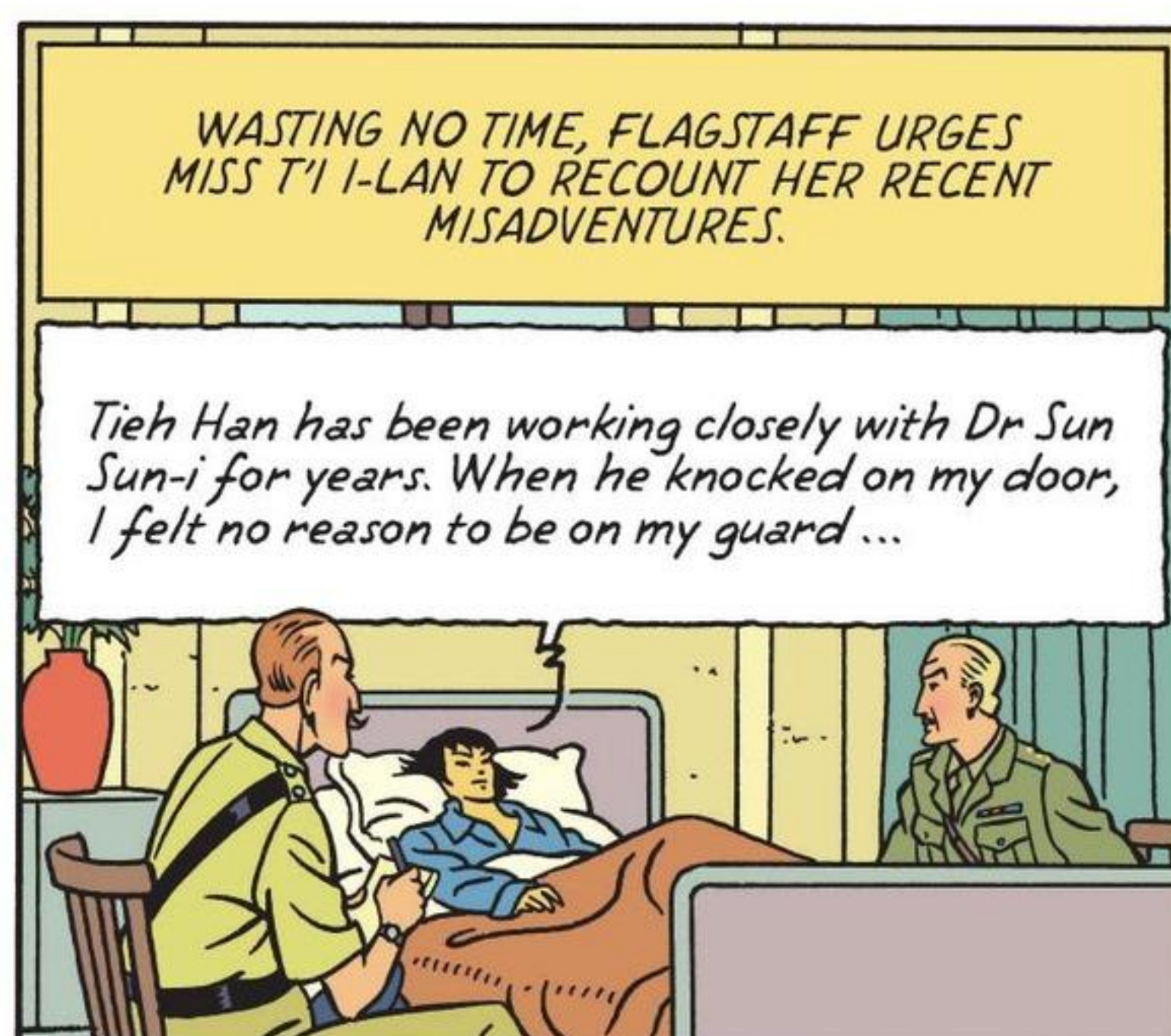




Chief Inspector Flagstaff!
The woman is conscious!



I give you 15 minutes, gentlemen, and not a second more. Understood?

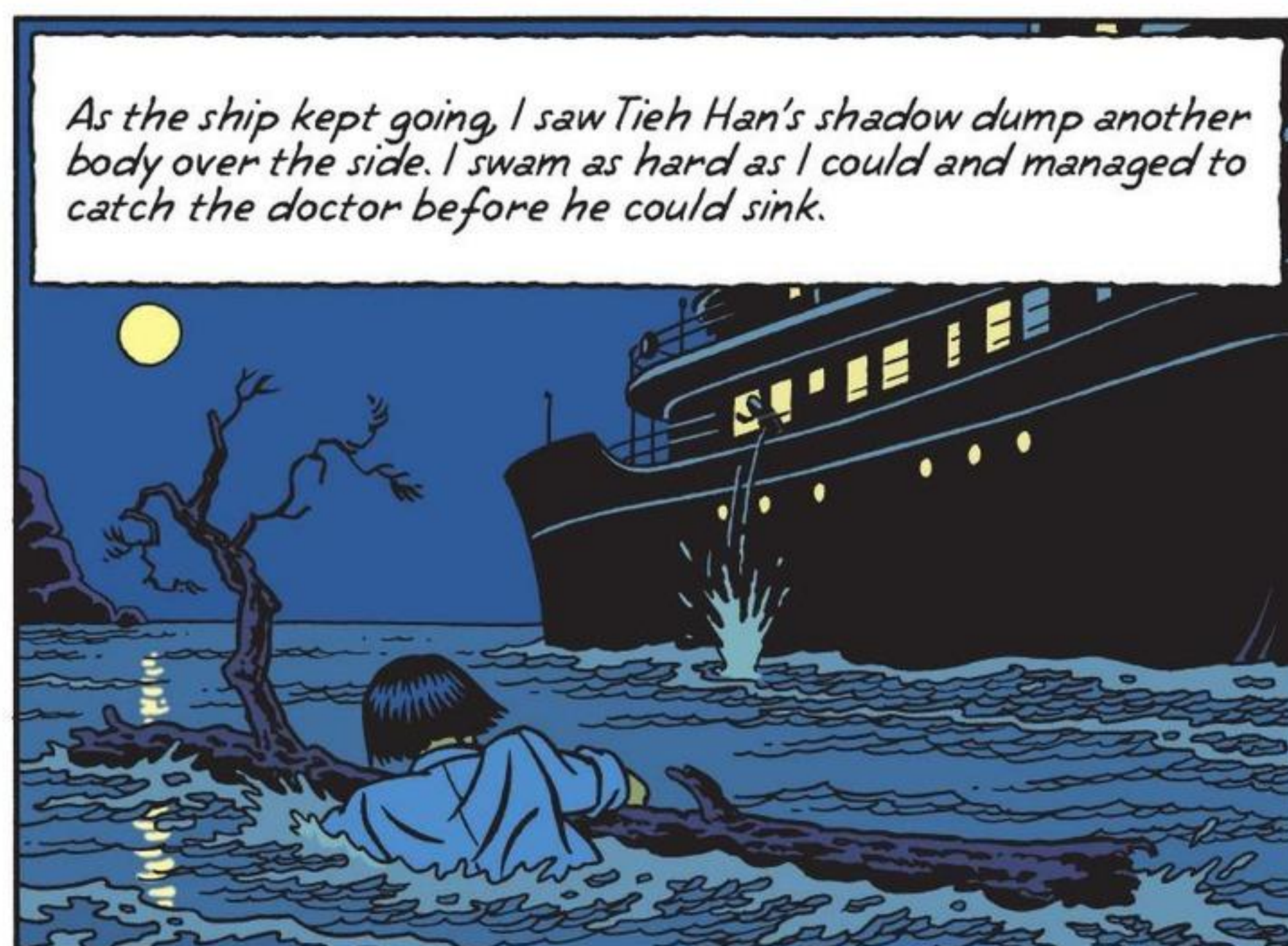


WASTING NO TIME, FLAGSTAFF URGES MISS T' I I-LAN TO RECOUNT HER RECENT MISADVENTURES.

Tieh Han has been working closely with Dr Sun Sun-i for years. When he knocked on my door, I felt no reason to be on my guard ...



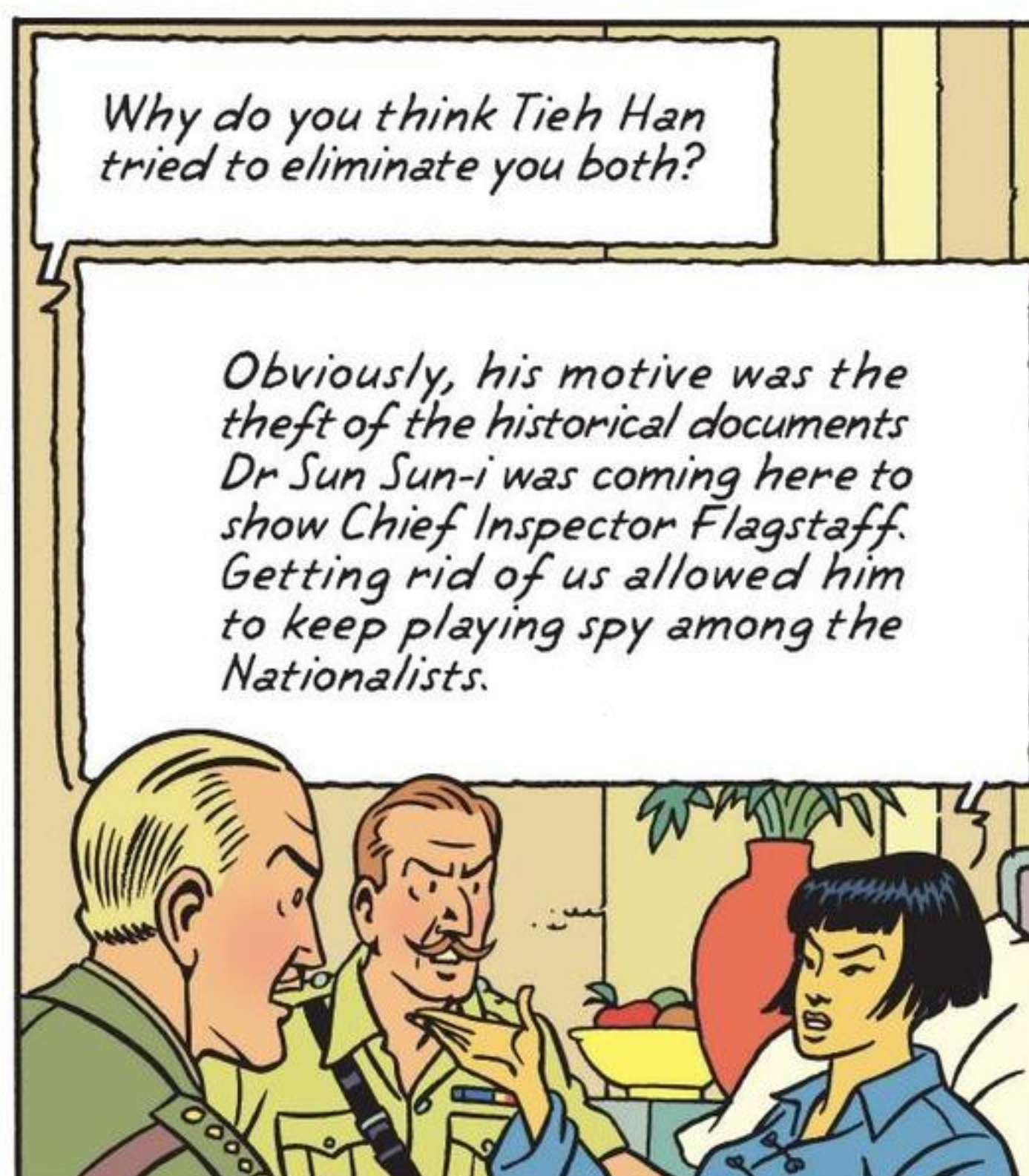
... and he knocked me out! Then, that dog threw me overboard! Splashing into that freezing water woke me up. Fortunately, there was a big branch floating nearby for me to grab on to.



As the ship kept going, I saw Tieh Han's shadow dump another body over the side. I swam as hard as I could and managed to catch the doctor before he could sink.

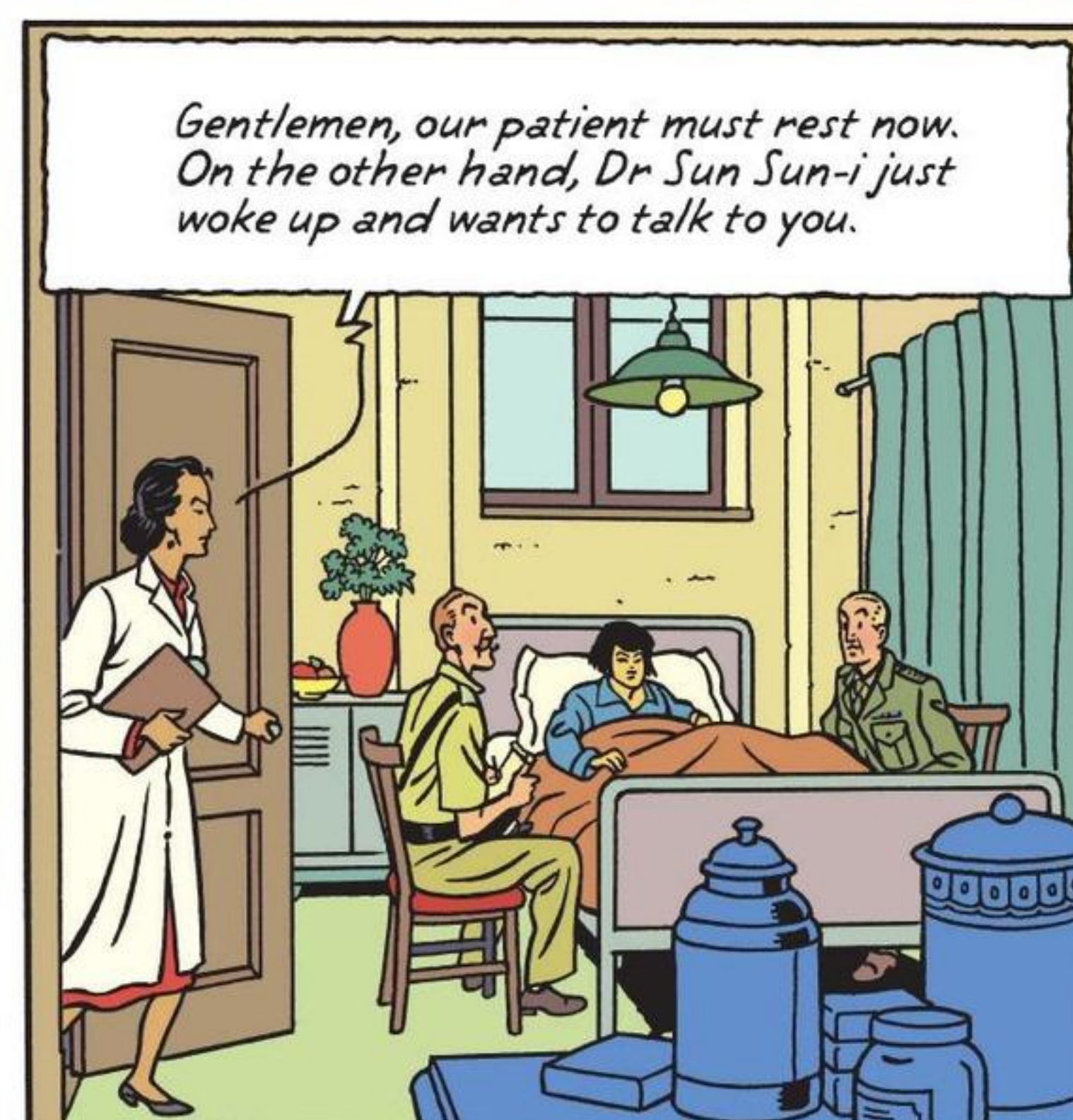


Hanging on to our branch, we drifted to a rocky islet. The next day I was able to catch your patrol's eye.



Why do you think Tieh Han tried to eliminate you both?

Obviously, his motive was the theft of the historical documents Dr Sun Sun-i was coming here to show Chief Inspector Flagstaff. Getting rid of us allowed him to keep playing spy among the Nationalists.



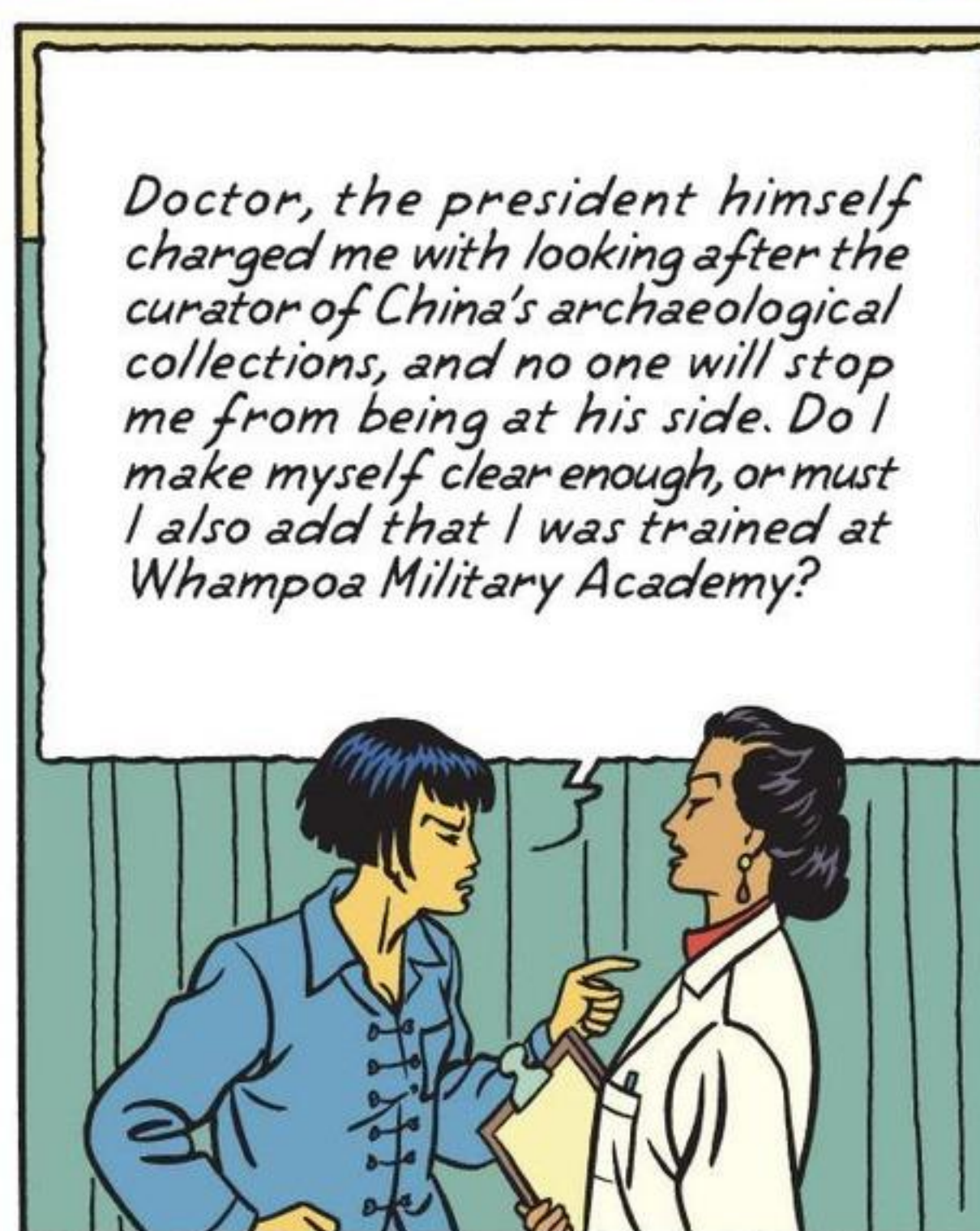
Gentlemen, our patient must rest now. On the other hand, Dr Sun Sun-i just woke up and wants to talk to you.



Take us to him, Doctor.

I'm coming too.

Come now, Miss. Be sensible, please!



Doctor, the president himself charged me with looking after the curator of China's archaeological collections, and no one will stop me from being at his side. Do I make myself clear enough, or must I also add that I was trained at Whampoa Military Academy?



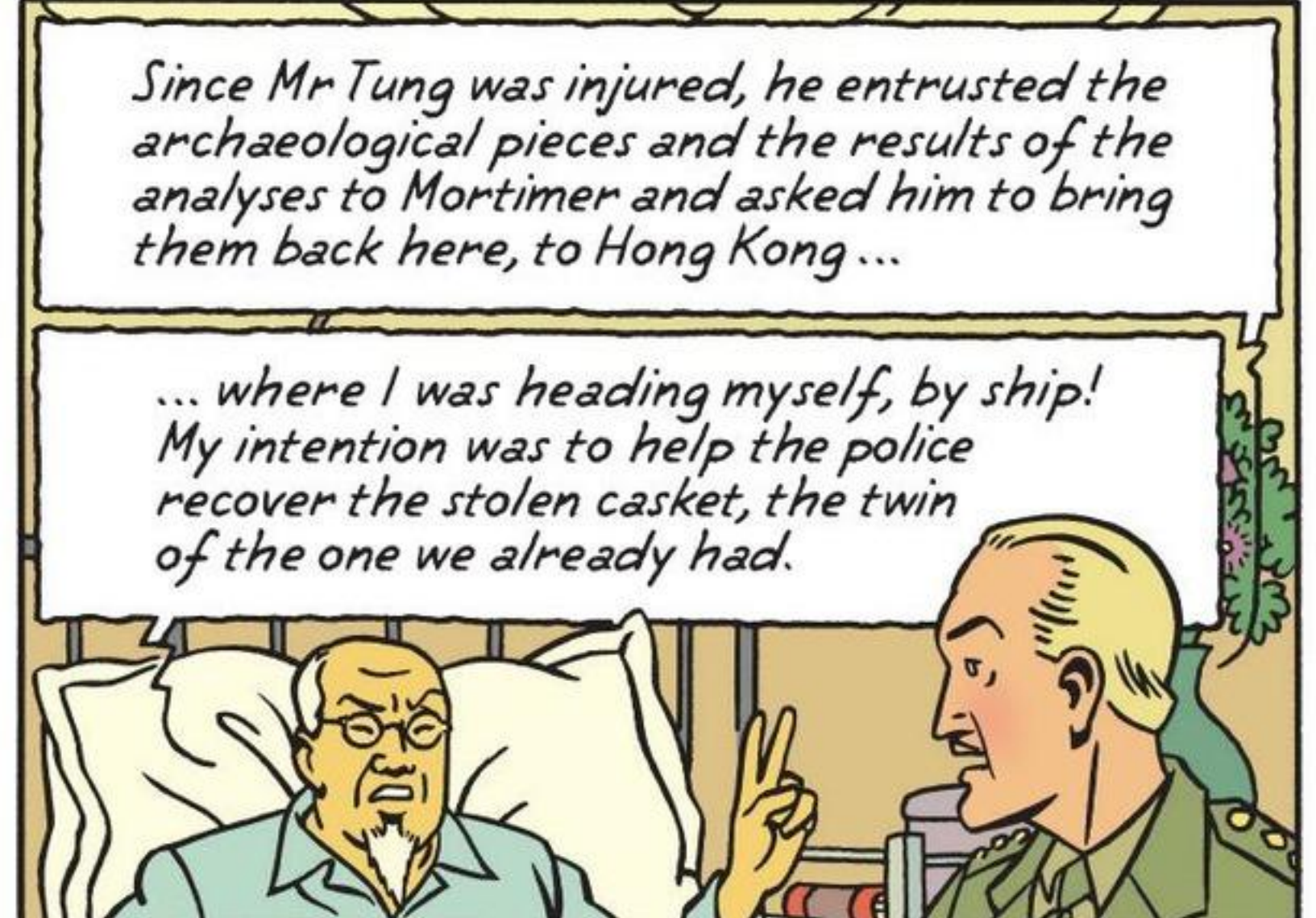
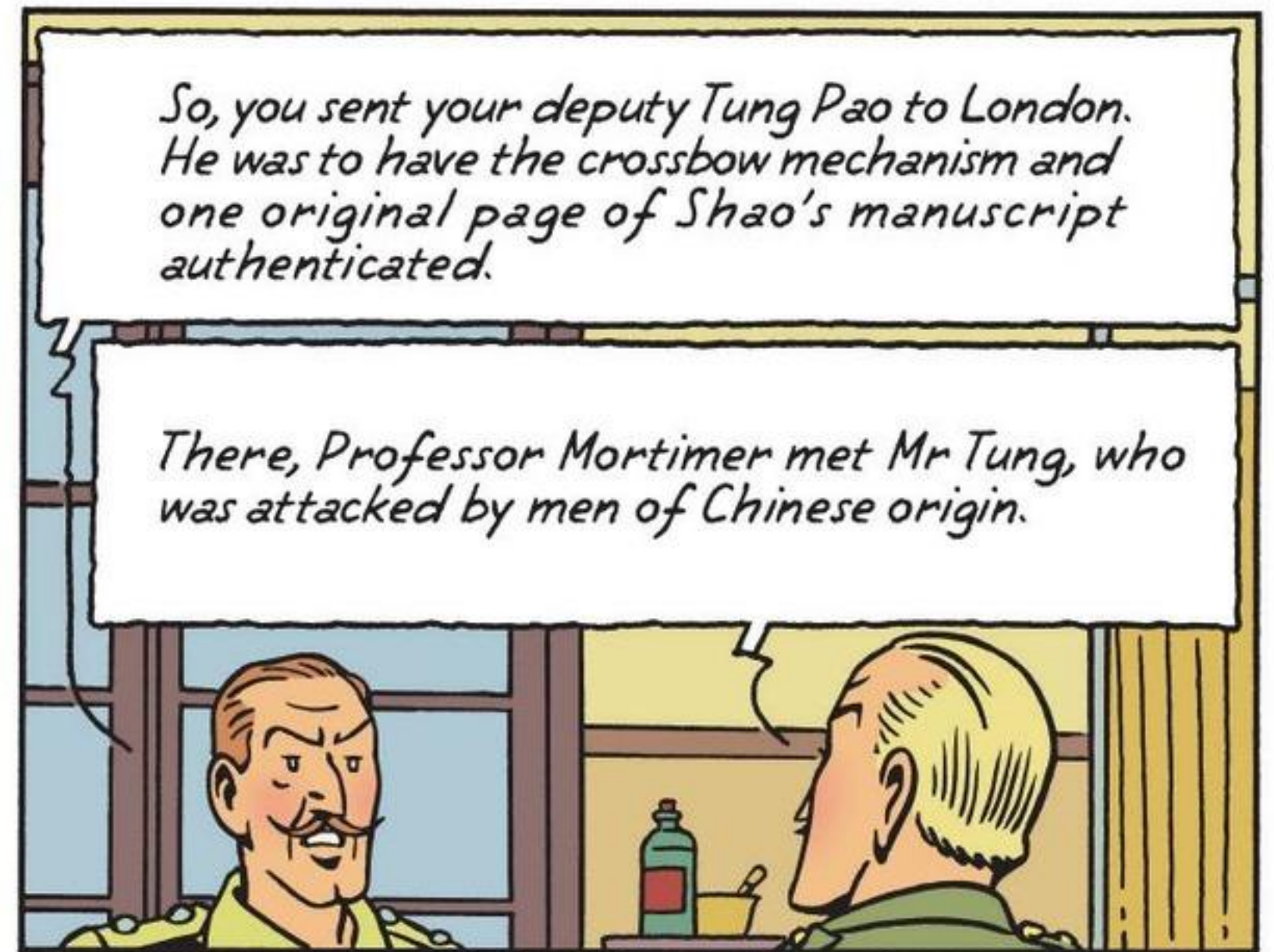
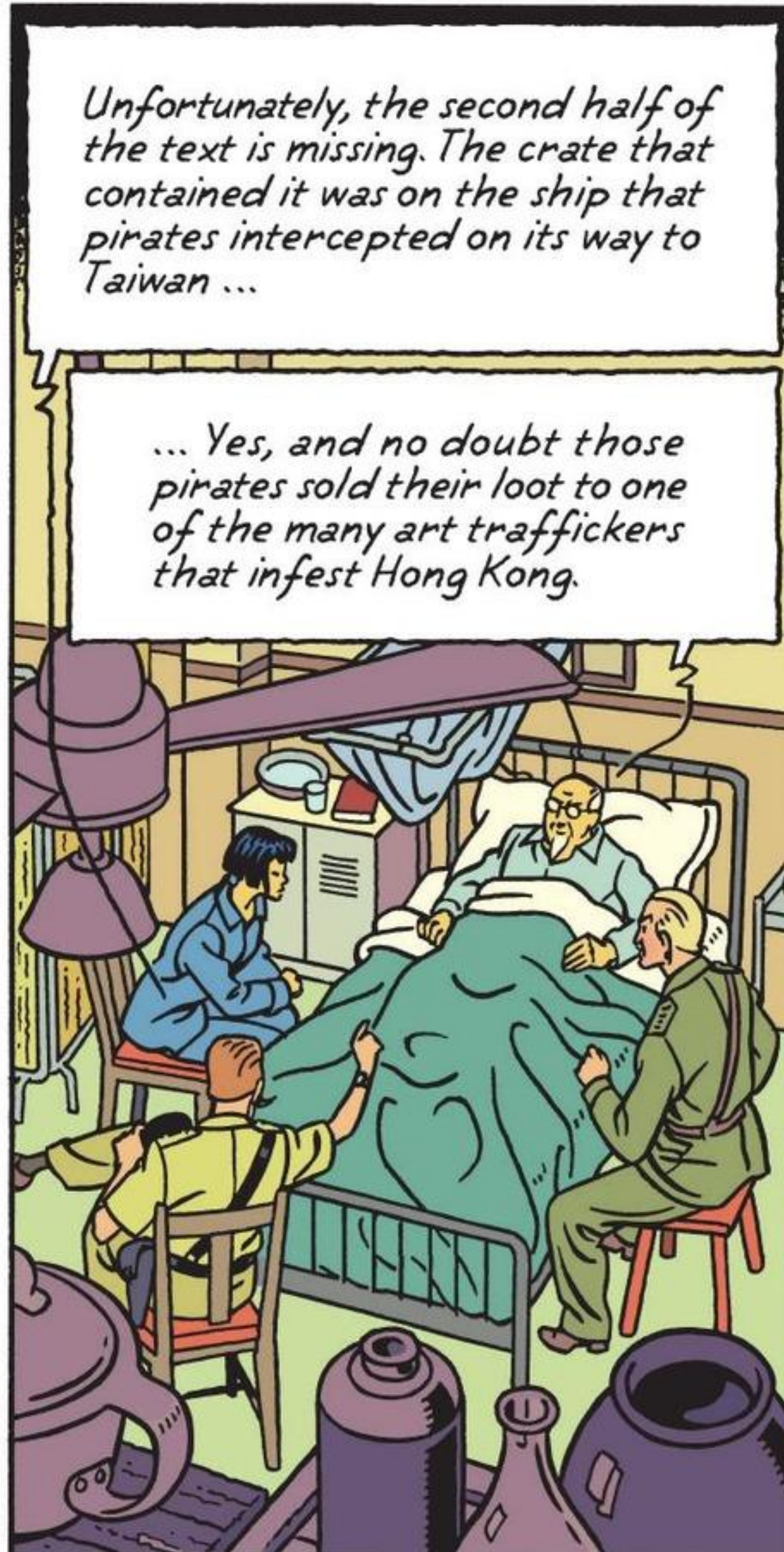
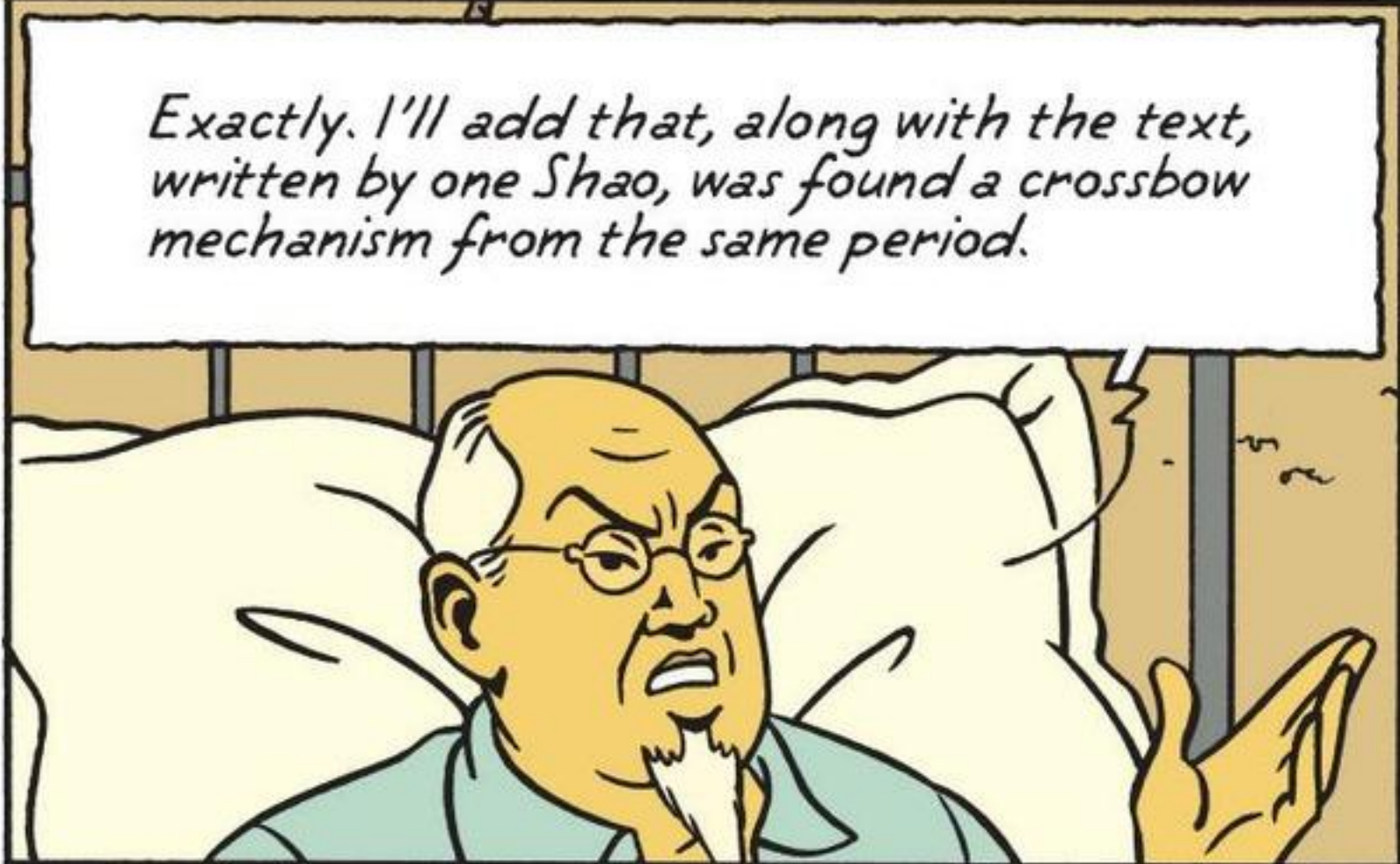
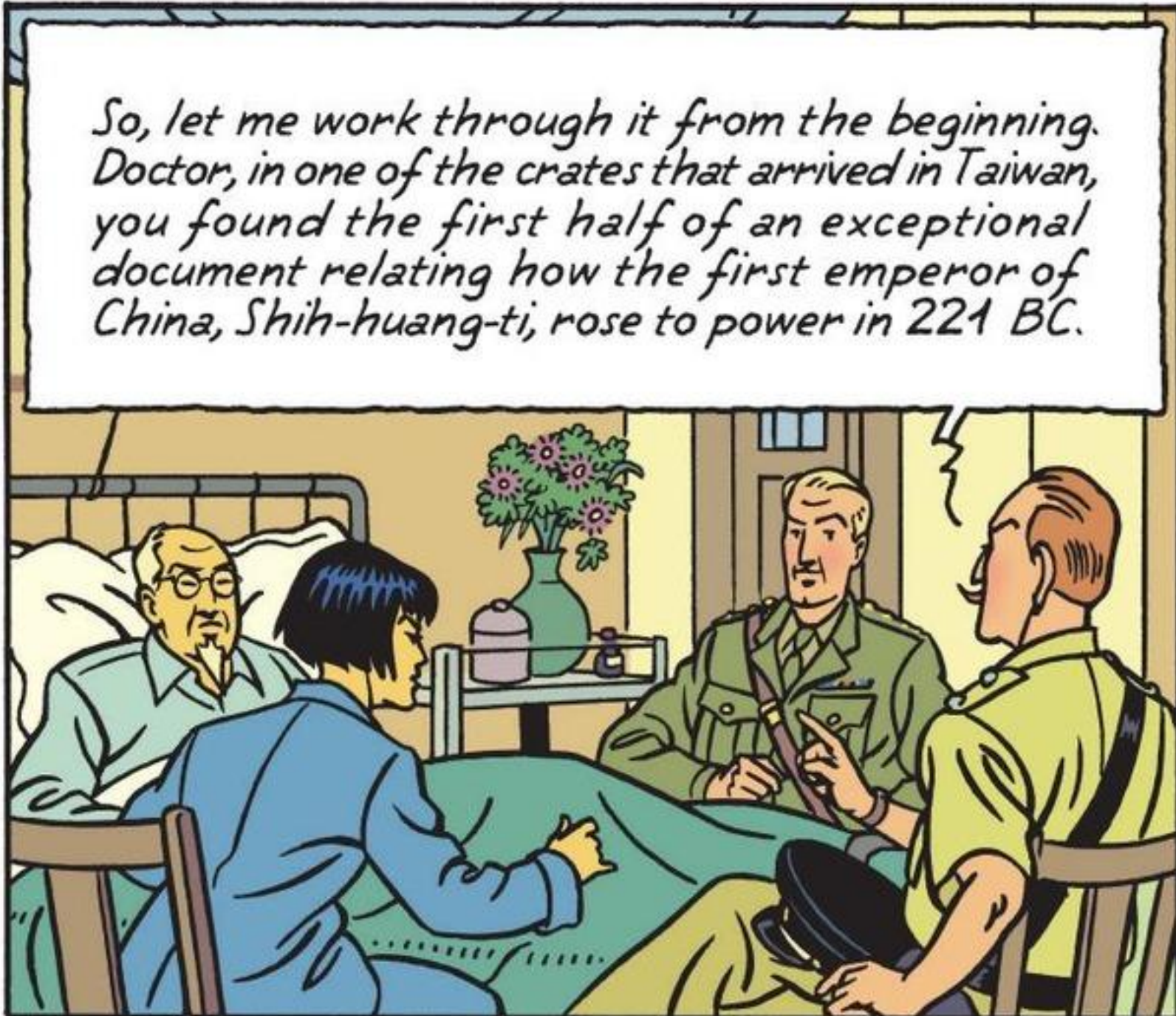
I see. A former 'Blue Shirt'*, is that it? Go on, then. The sooner you're out of this hospital, the better.

Lead the way, Doctor.

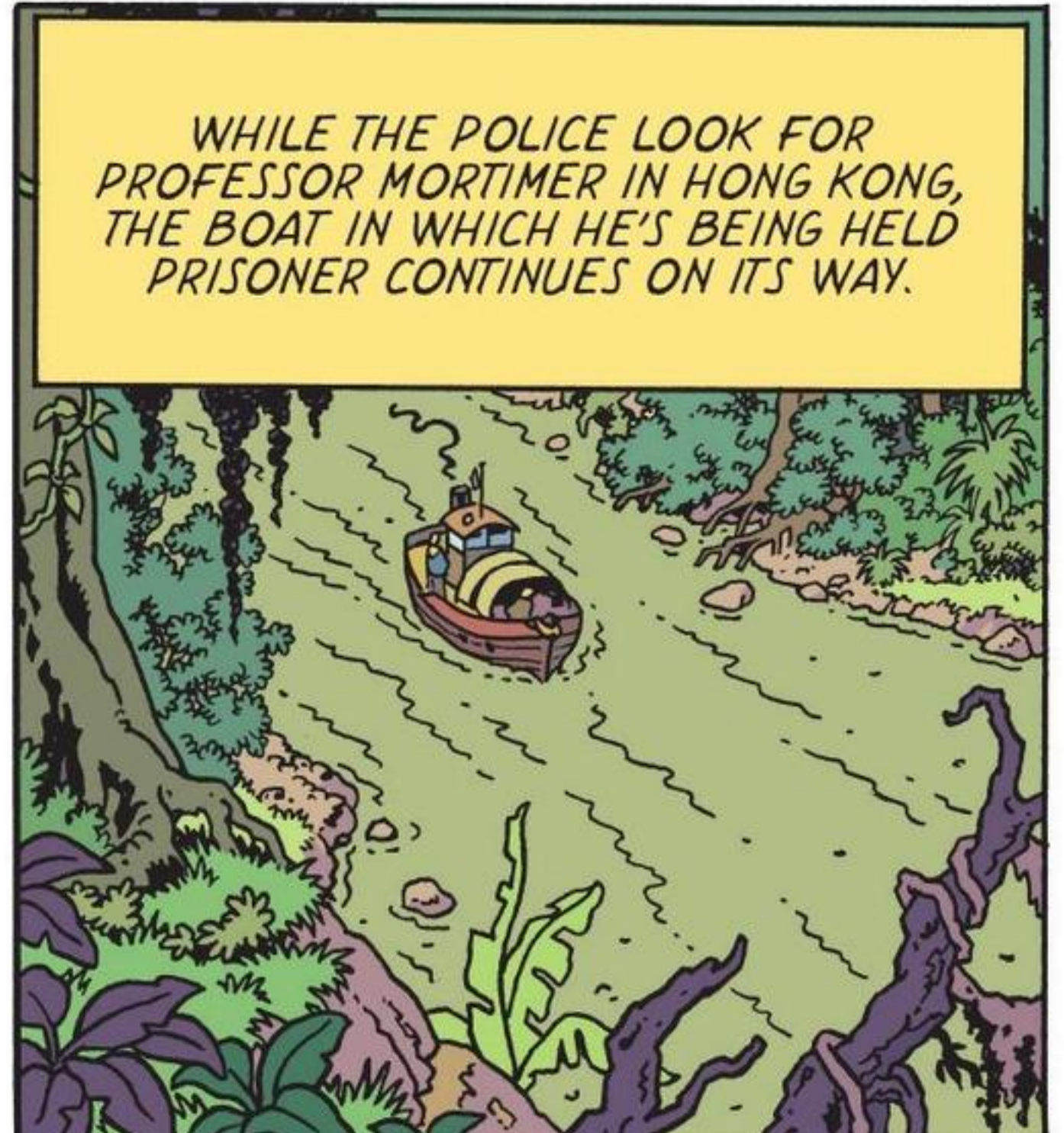
*SECRET ULTRANATIONALIST FACTION WITHIN CHIANG KAI-SHEK'S KUOMINTANG, MODELLED AFTER FASCIST ITALY'S BLACK SHIRTS, AND WHOSE ORIGINAL MEMBERS CAME, IN GREAT PART, FROM WHAMPOA MILITARY ACADEMY



IN LESS THAN THIRTY MINUTES, THE FOUR, GATHERED IN DR SUN SUN-1'S ROOM, HAVE SHARED WHAT THEY KNOW ABOUT THE CURRENT CRISIS.



*ALL THESE EVENTS WERE DEPICTED IN PART ONE OF THE VALLEY OF THE IMMORTALS.



This is slow going. How about we kill time in an intelligent manner, Mr Tieh?

What do you mean?

So, by the end of the first document, Shao had recounted how, in 221 BC, Ying Cheng, king of Ch'in, had defeated the last of the six enemy kingdoms thanks to the discovery of the crossbow, which he owed to a young merchant named Shou Kung...

That same year, Shou Kung, now a general, finished reorganising the king's army ... and fell in love with a servant of the palace. Before long, he was eager to impress his intended ...

These twin caskets hold the entirety of Shao's text, don't they? Back in London, Professor Tung Pao told me what the first half said. Why don't you translate the rest for me?

If you want.

He told Chancellor Li Ssu that he was ready to take his rightful place as heir to the throne – as had been promised to the one who would save the kingdom.

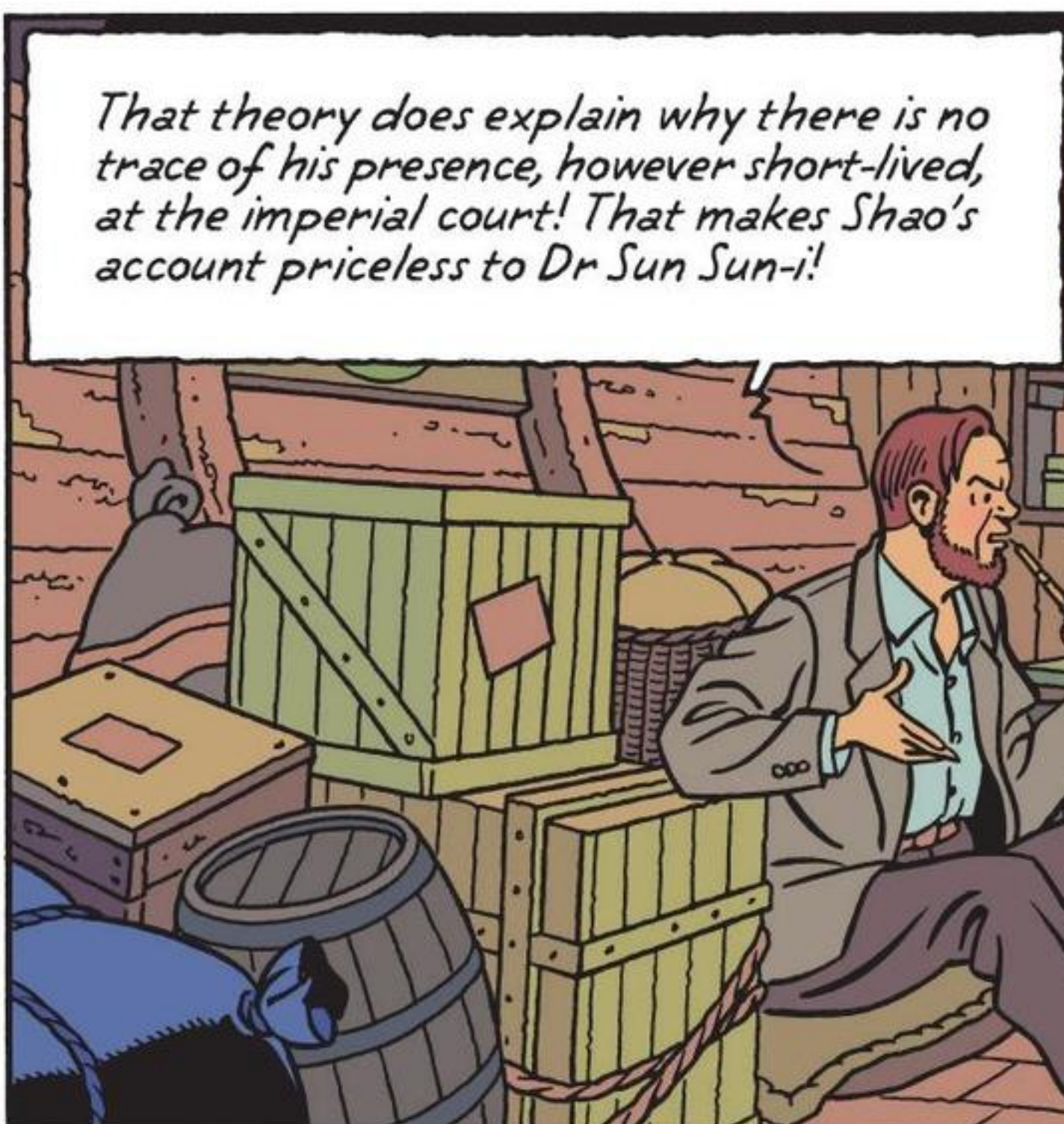
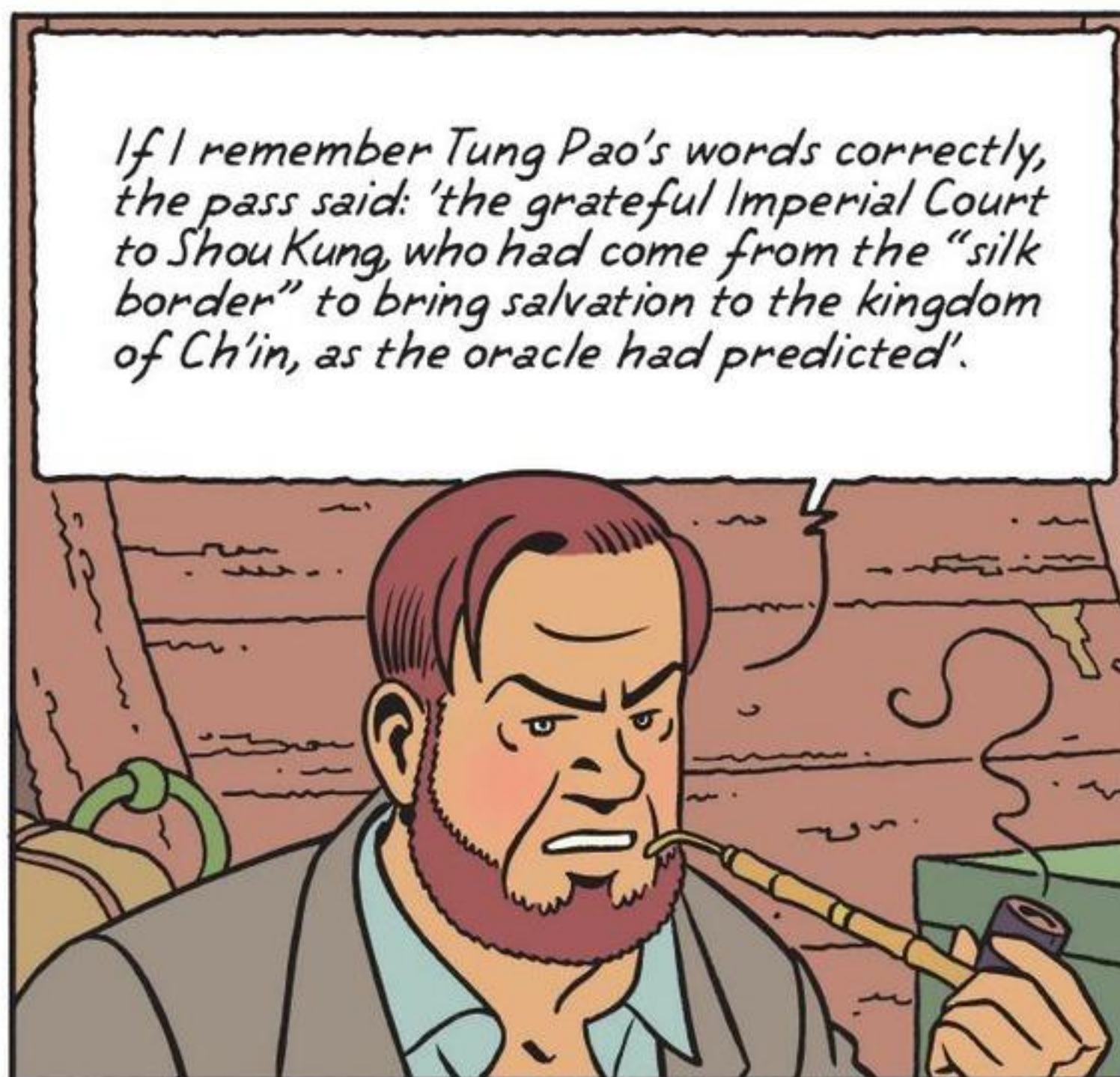
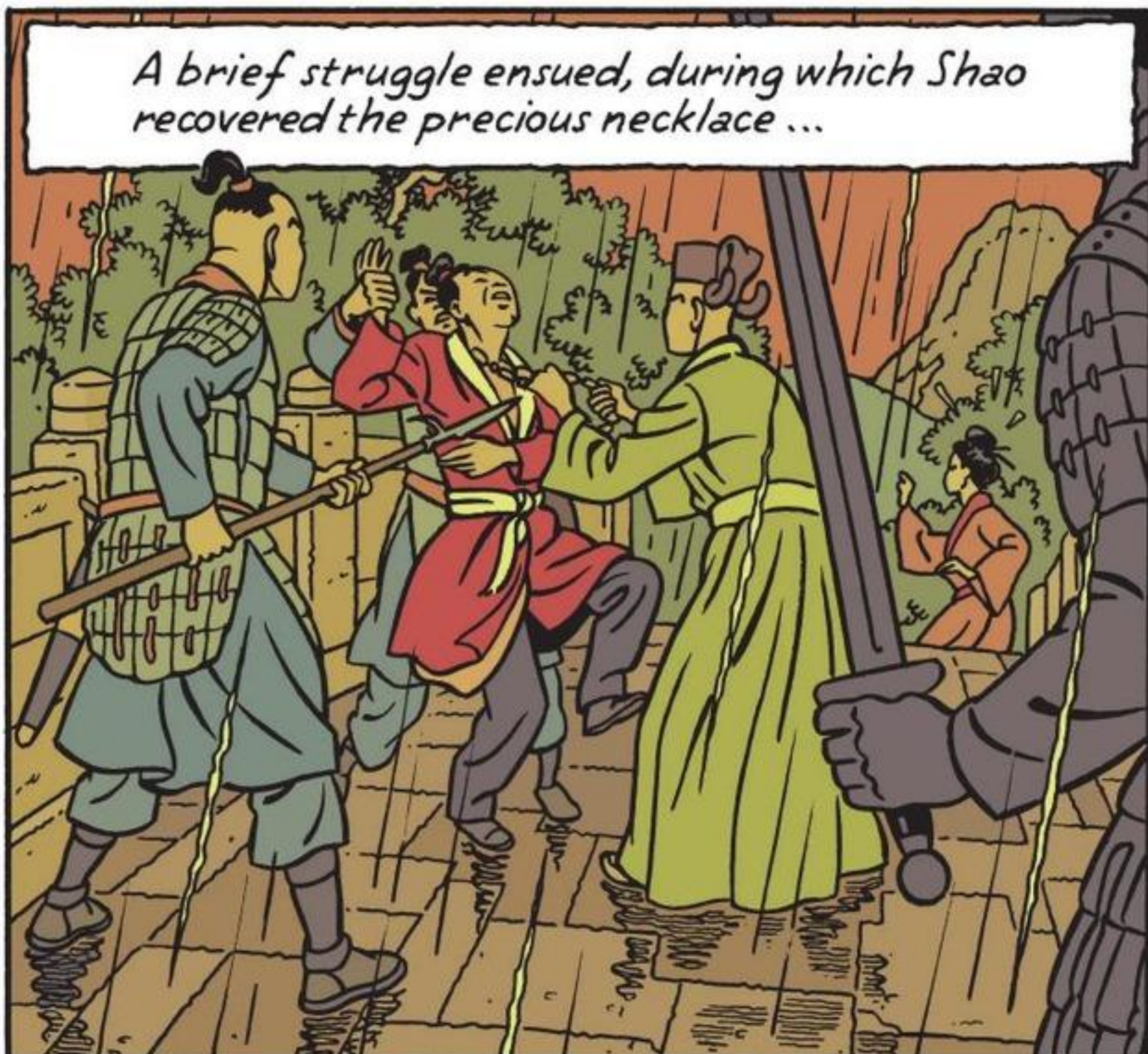
Li Ssu made it clear to Shou Kung that it was unthinkable for a former merchant to become king and that pressing his case could turn out to be deadly for him and his betrothed.

He did, however, grant him an exceptional Imperial pass that would let him leave the Celestial Empire safely with his soon-to-be bride and return to the silk road to seek his fortune through trade.

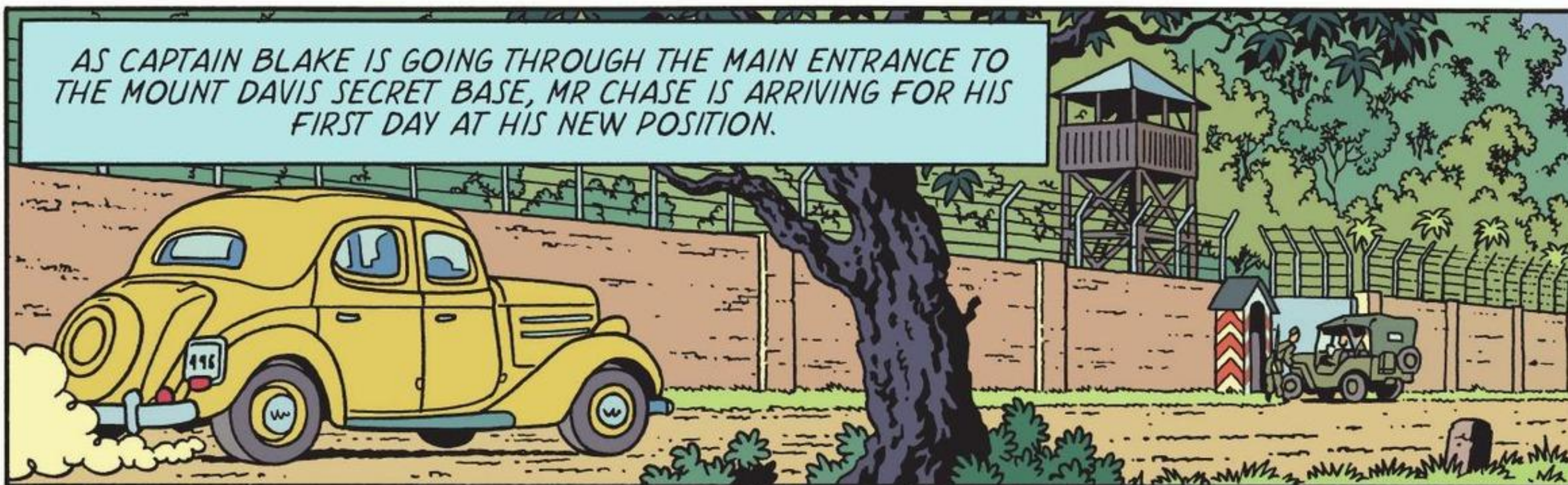
Li Ssu also rewarded him with a necklace and a bracelet, both of gold, as a sign of gratitude and full payment for services rendered. An escort, led by Shao, would take them to the border.

Here Shao says – I quote: 'But the secret order I had received called for a fatal accident to take place somewhere deserted.'

Good grief! It appears the forebears of today's politicians were already well versed in treachery. Go on – this is fascinating!

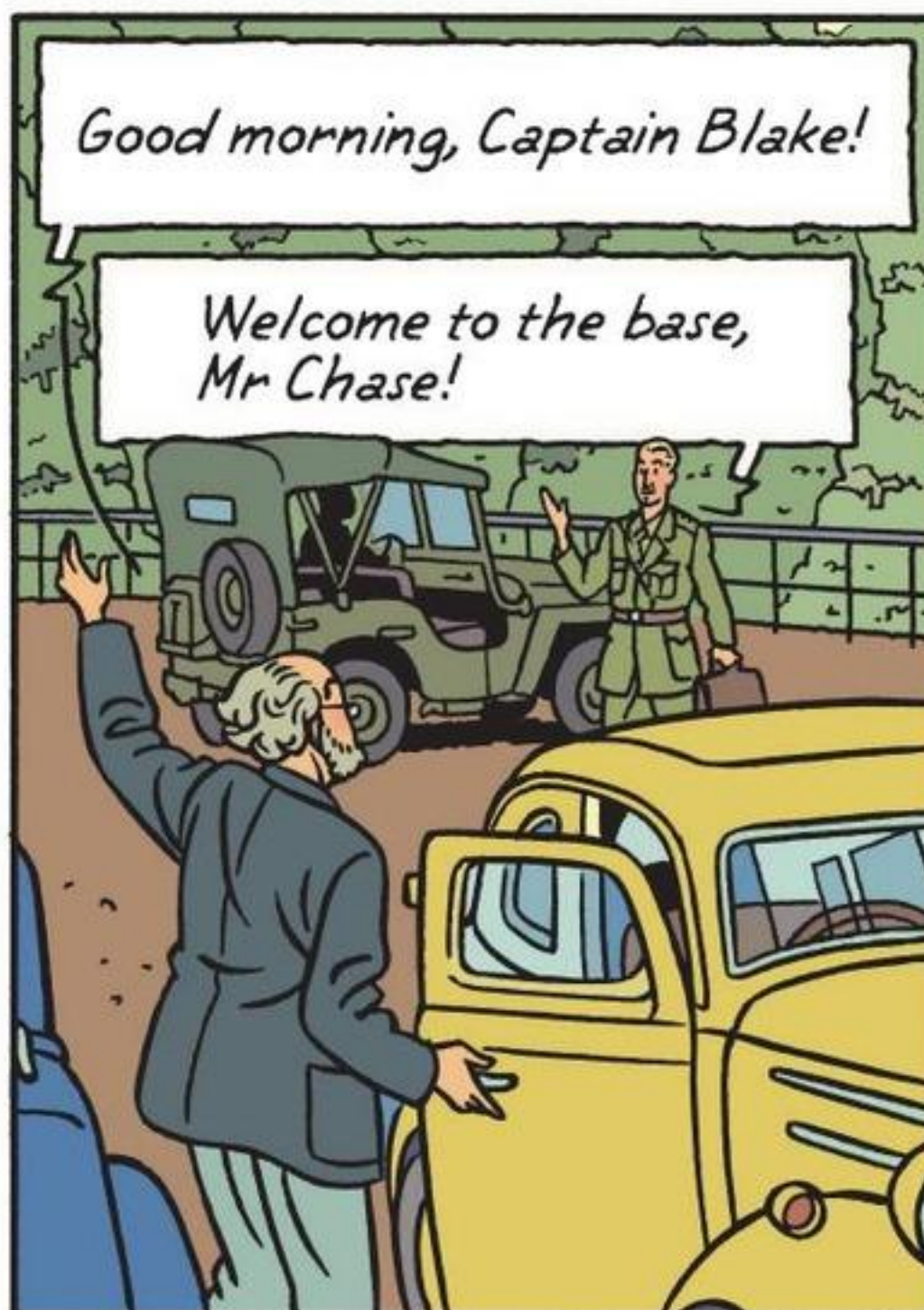


AS CAPTAIN BLAKE IS GOING THROUGH THE MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE MOUNT DAVIS SECRET BASE, MR CHASE IS ARRIVING FOR HIS FIRST DAY AT HIS NEW POSITION.

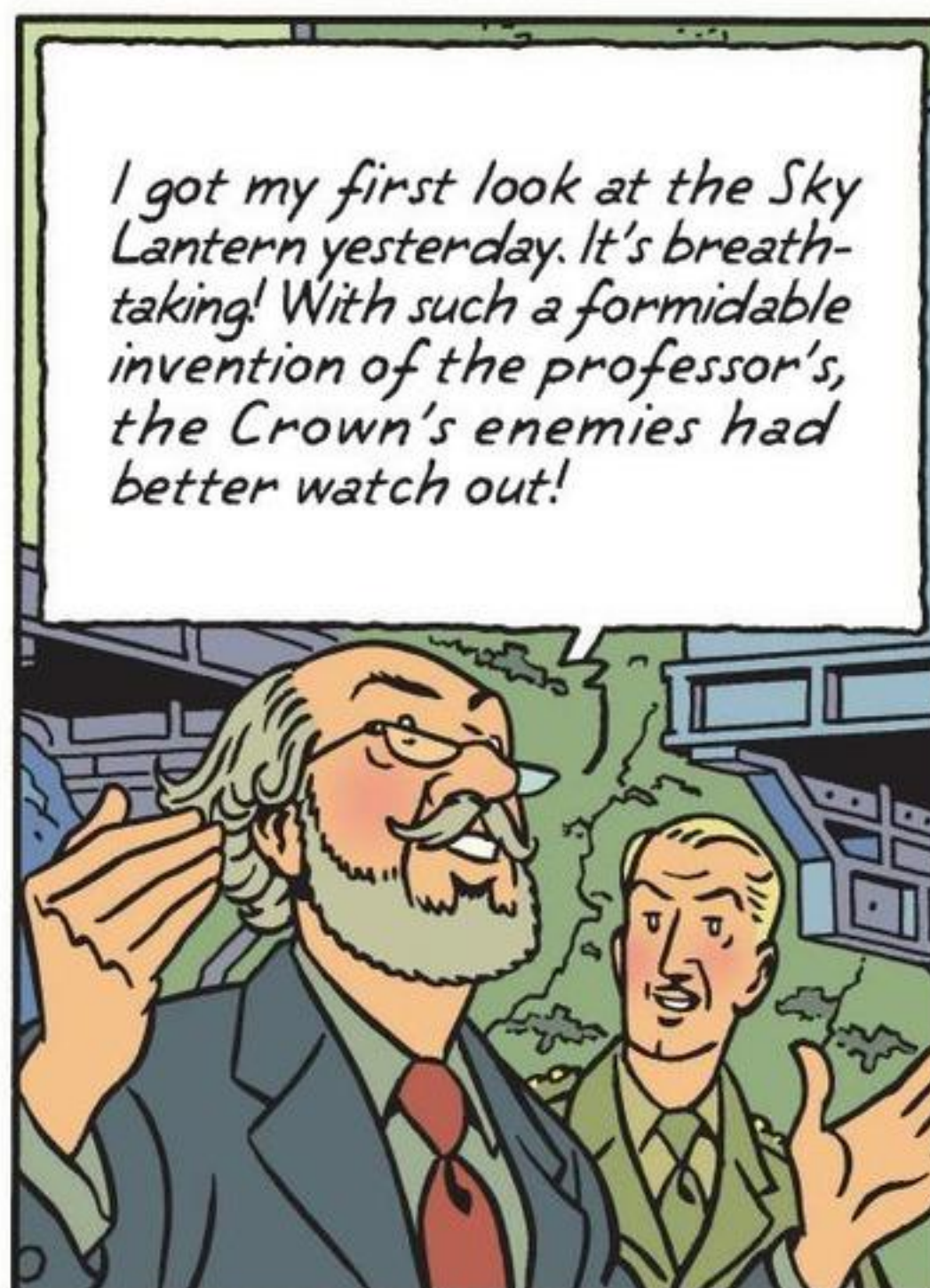


Good morning, Captain Blake!

Welcome to the base, Mr Chase!

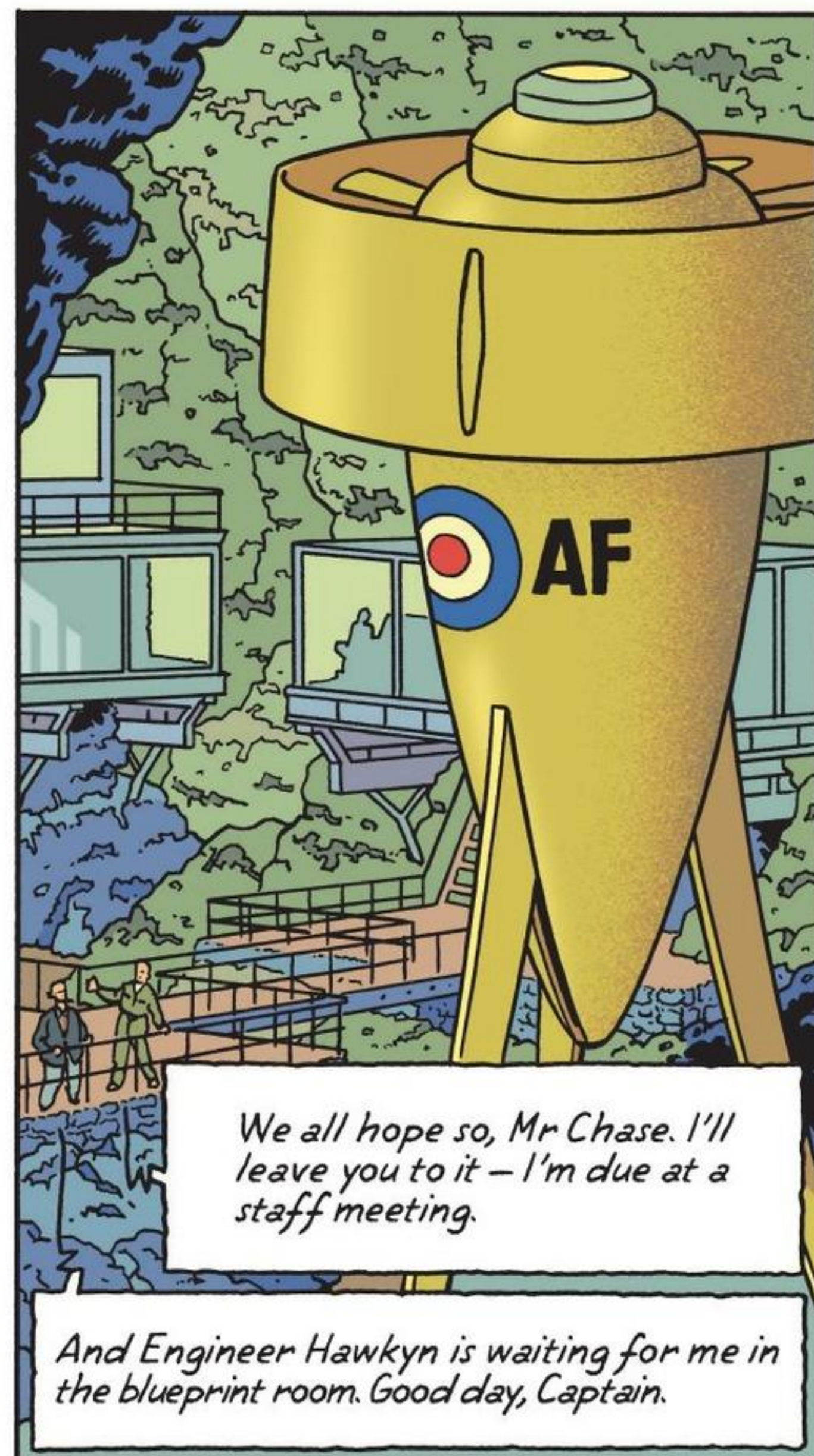


I got my first look at the Sky Lantern yesterday. It's breathtaking! With such a formidable invention of the professor's, the Crown's enemies had better watch out!

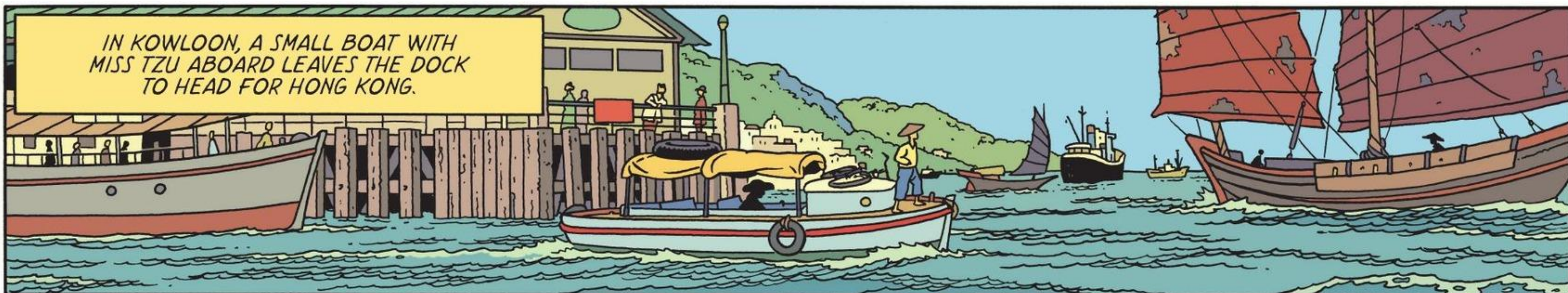


We all hope so, Mr Chase. I'll leave you to it – I'm due at a staff meeting.

And Engineer Hawkyn is waiting for me in the blueprint room. Good day, Captain.



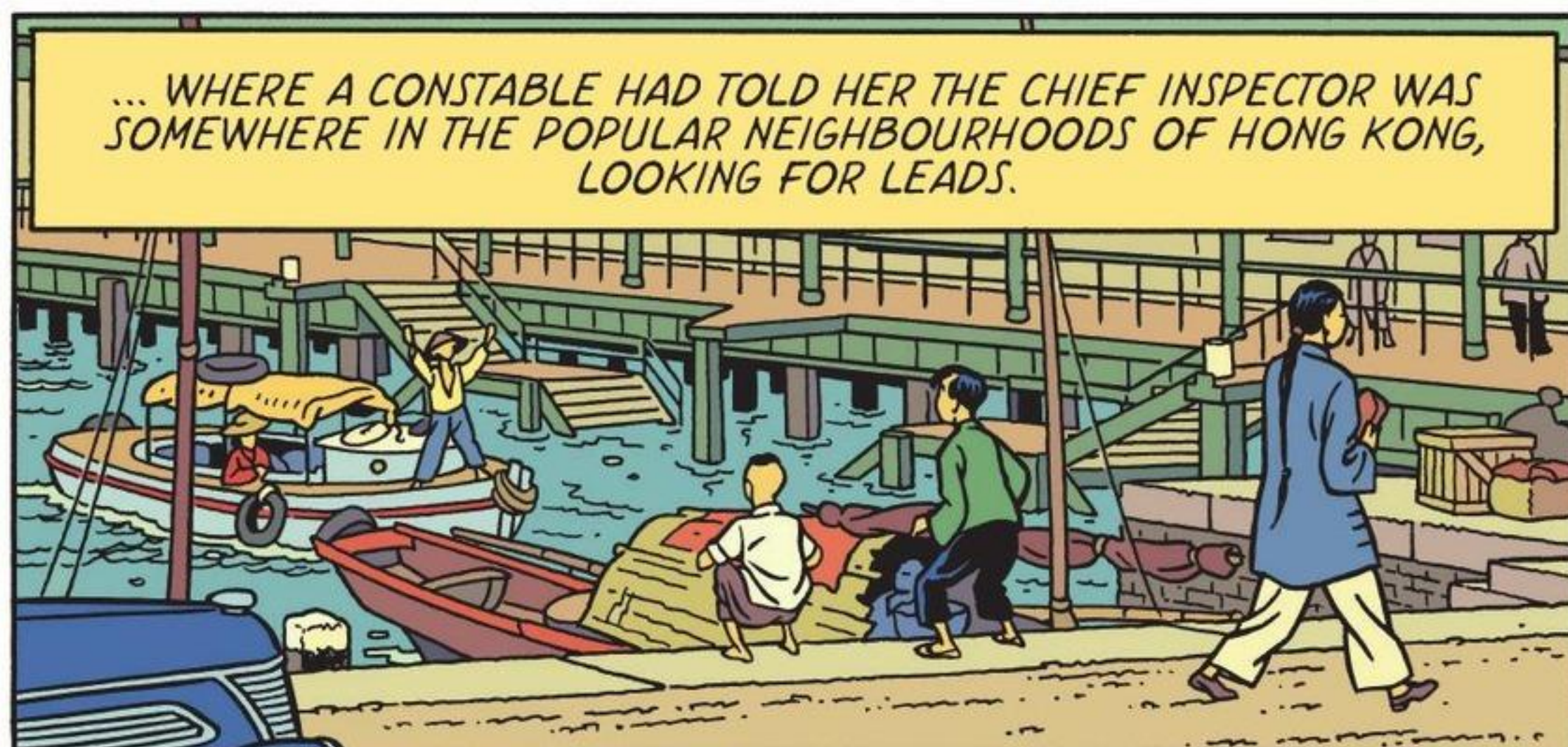
IN KOWLOON, A SMALL BOAT WITH MISS TZU ABOARD LEAVES THE DOCK TO HEAD FOR HONG KONG.



AFTER TAKING THE TWO YOUNG CHILDREN RESCUED FROM THE PEARL RIVER TO A SAFE PLACE, THE DIRECTOR OF THE ORPHANAGE HAD GONE TO THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE MARINE POLICE ...



... WHERE A CONSTABLE HAD TOLD HER THE CHIEF INSPECTOR WAS SOMEWHERE IN THE POPULAR NEIGHBOURHOODS OF HONG KONG, LOOKING FOR LEADS.



Hey, Ch'ang! Help me get my bicycle on to the dock, will you?



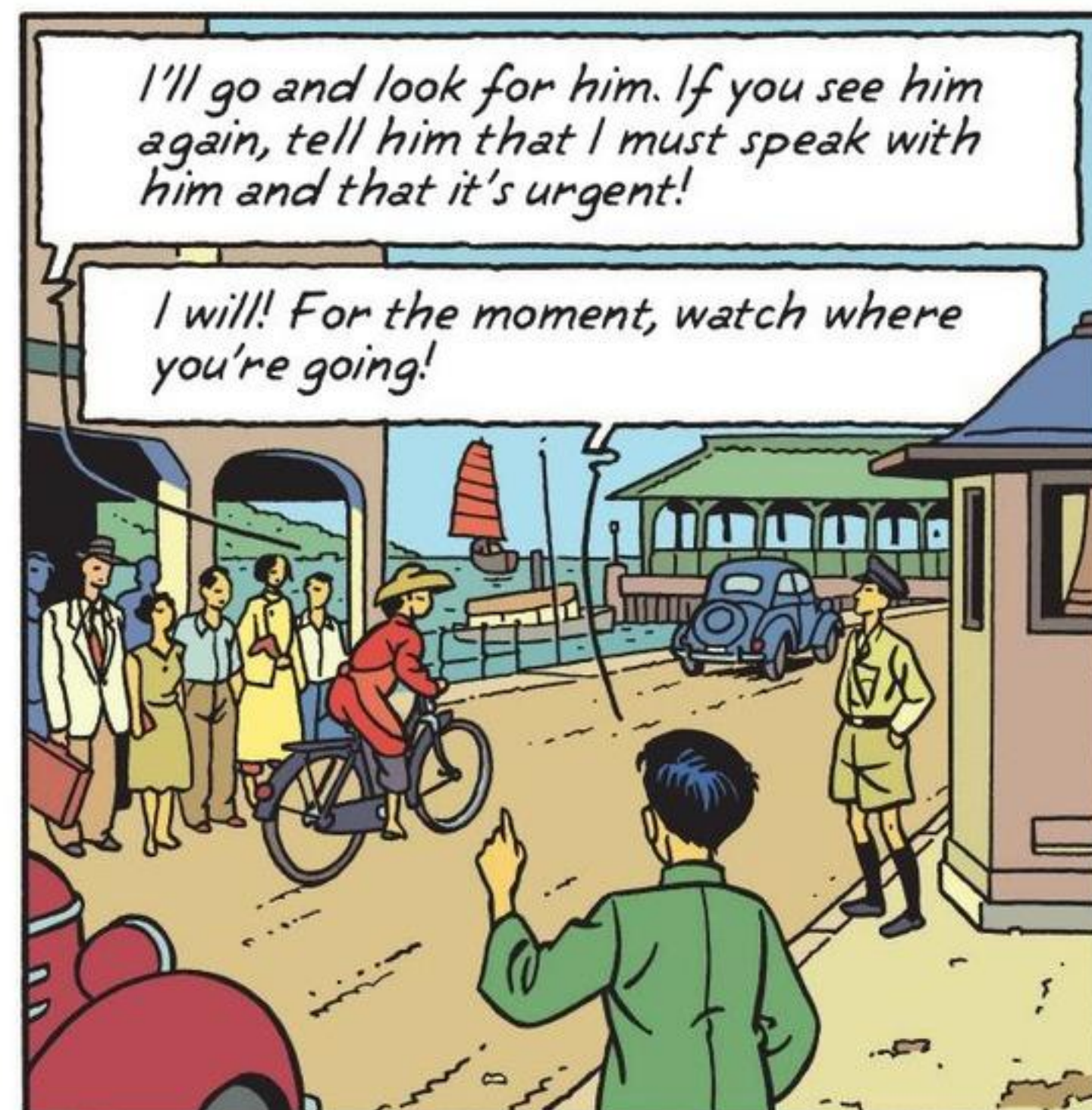
You wouldn't have seen Chief Inspector Flagstaff, by any chance?

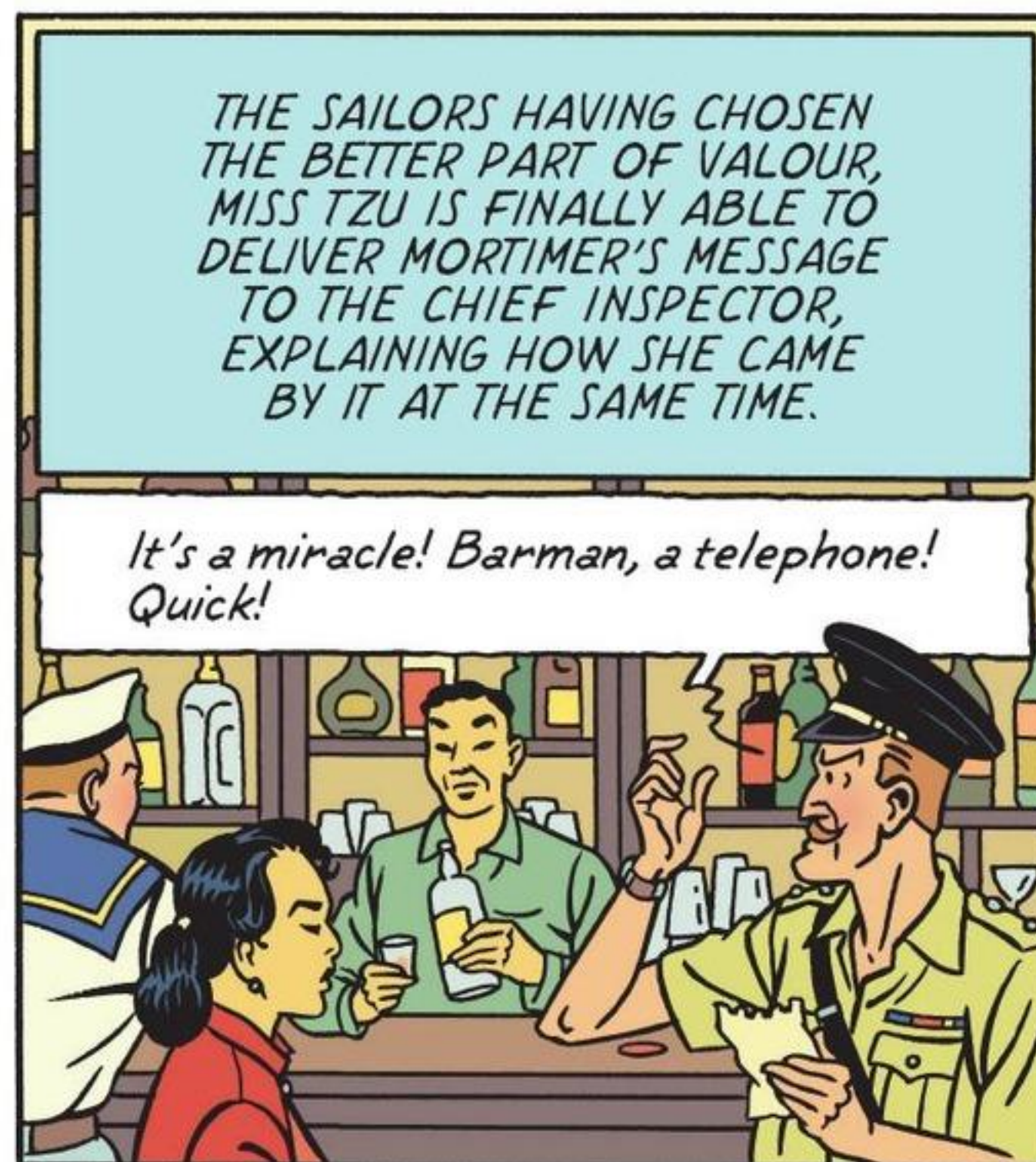
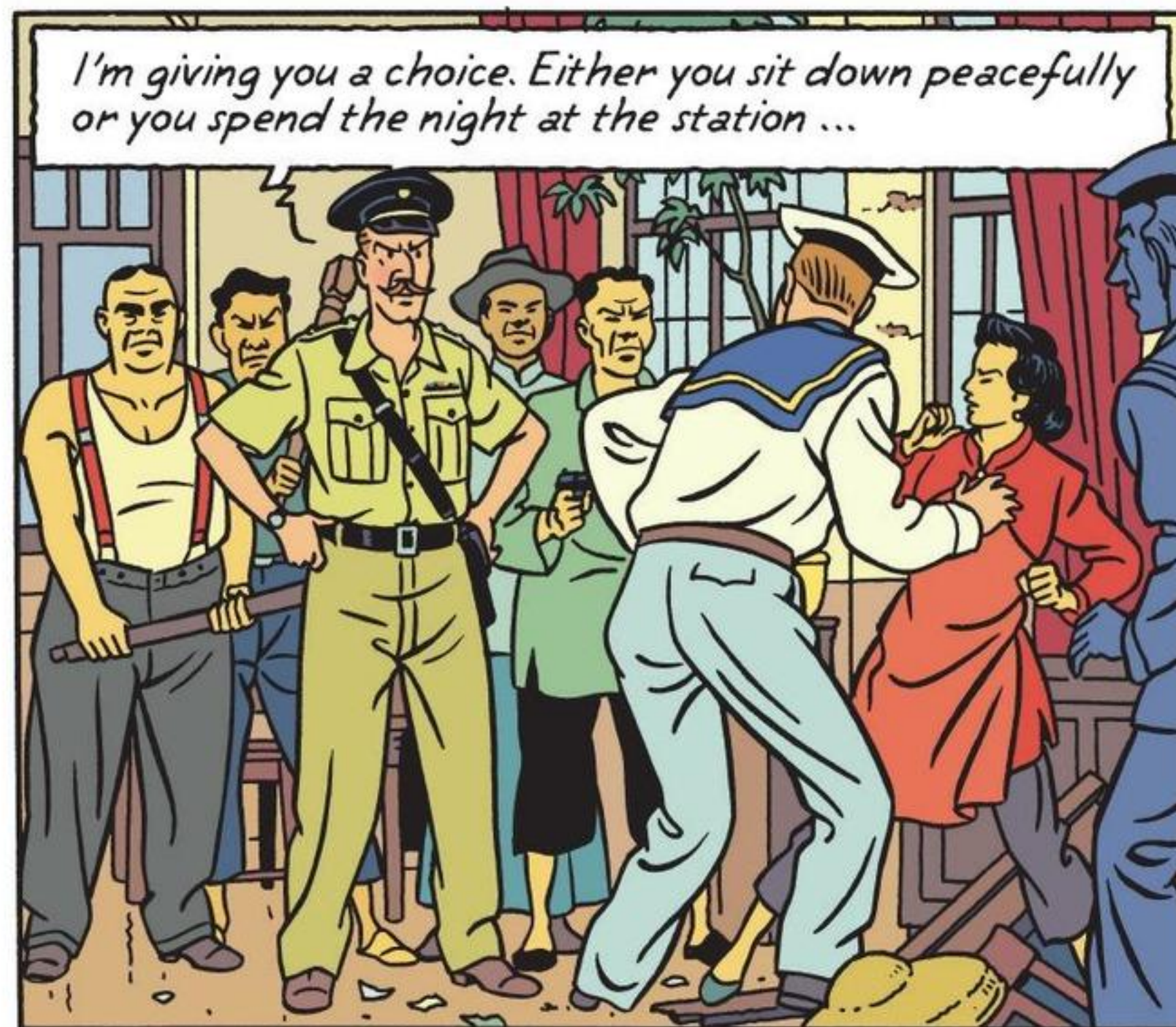
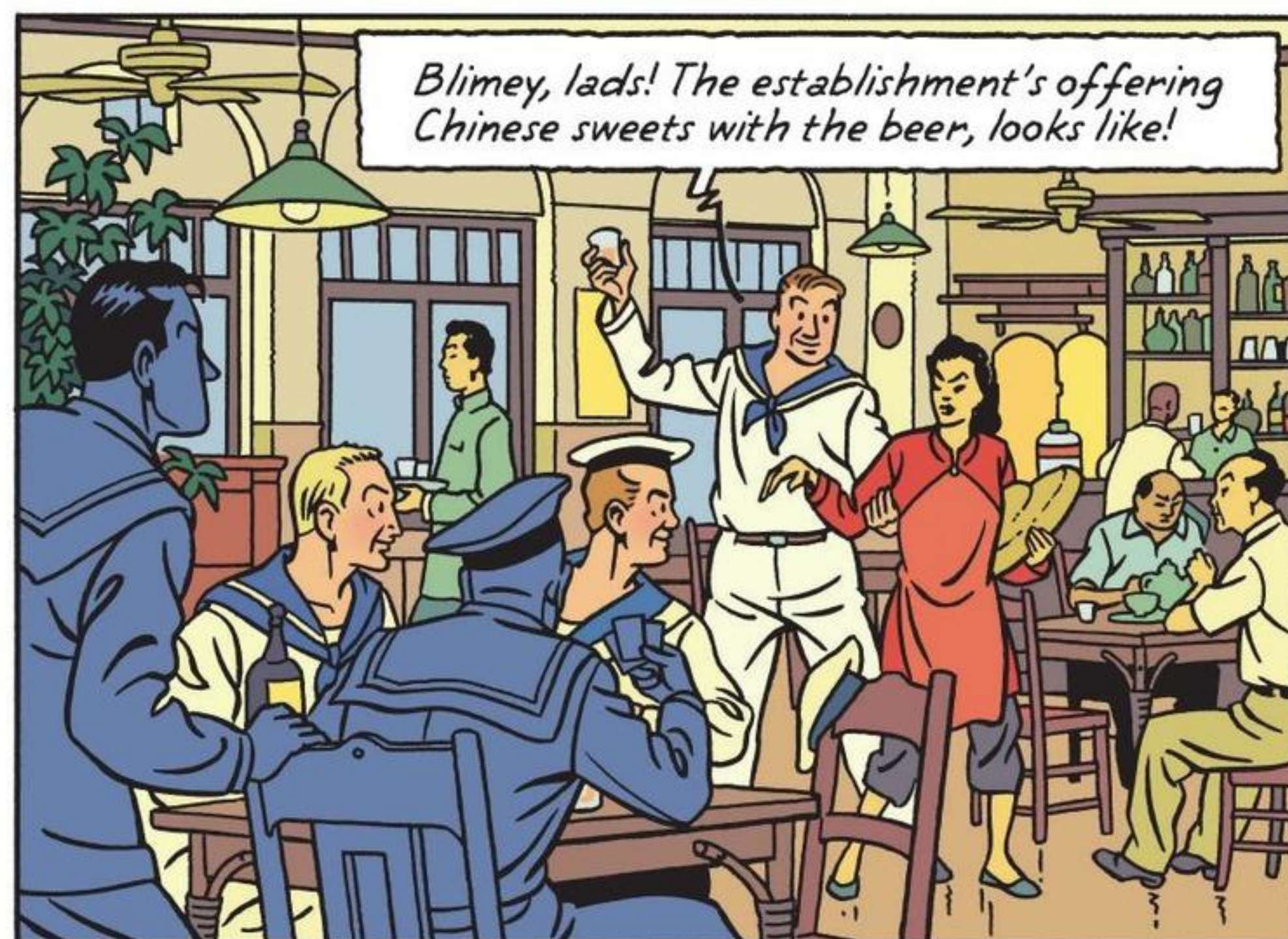
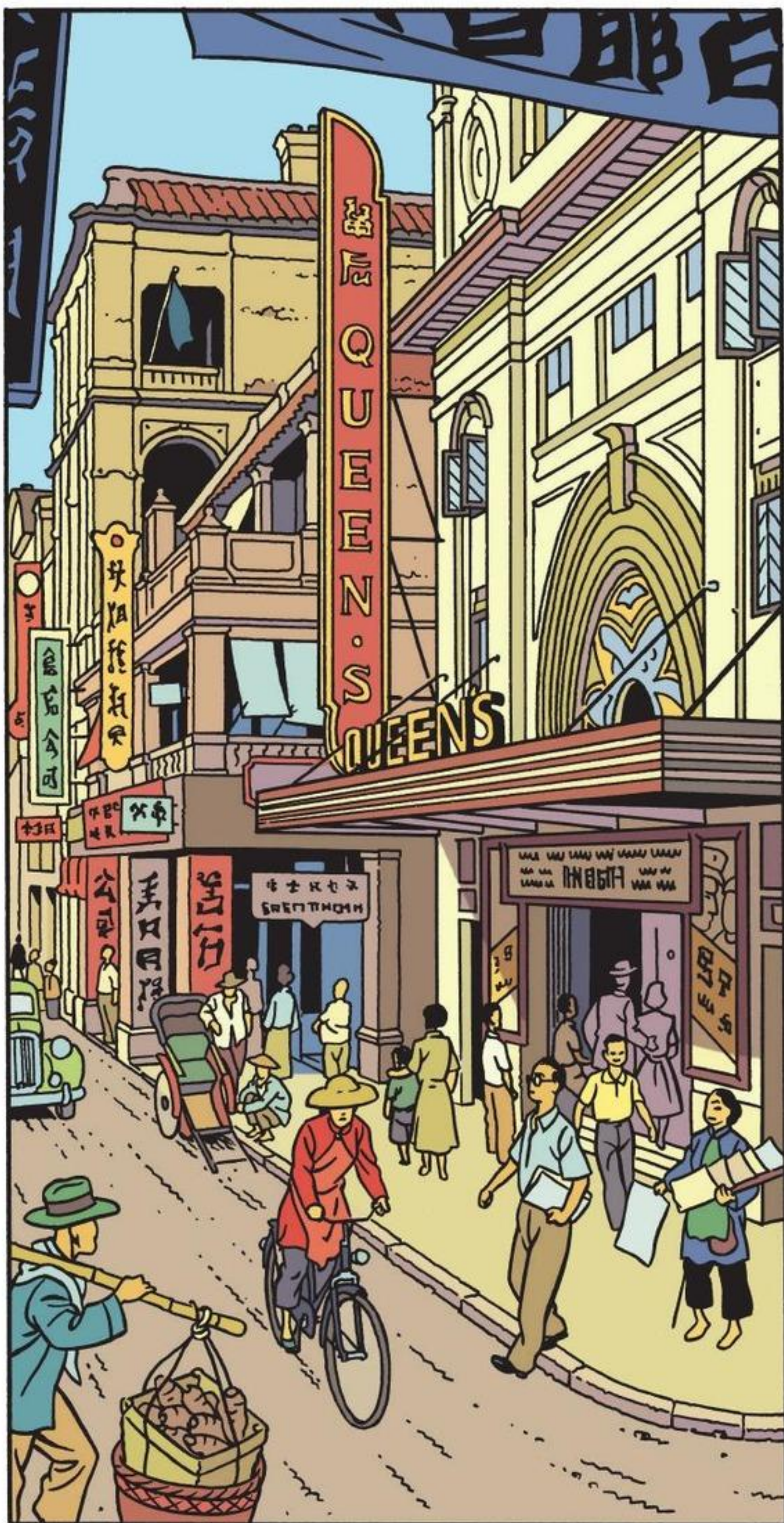
I saw him in his jeep about an hour ago. He was heading towards Wan Chai ...

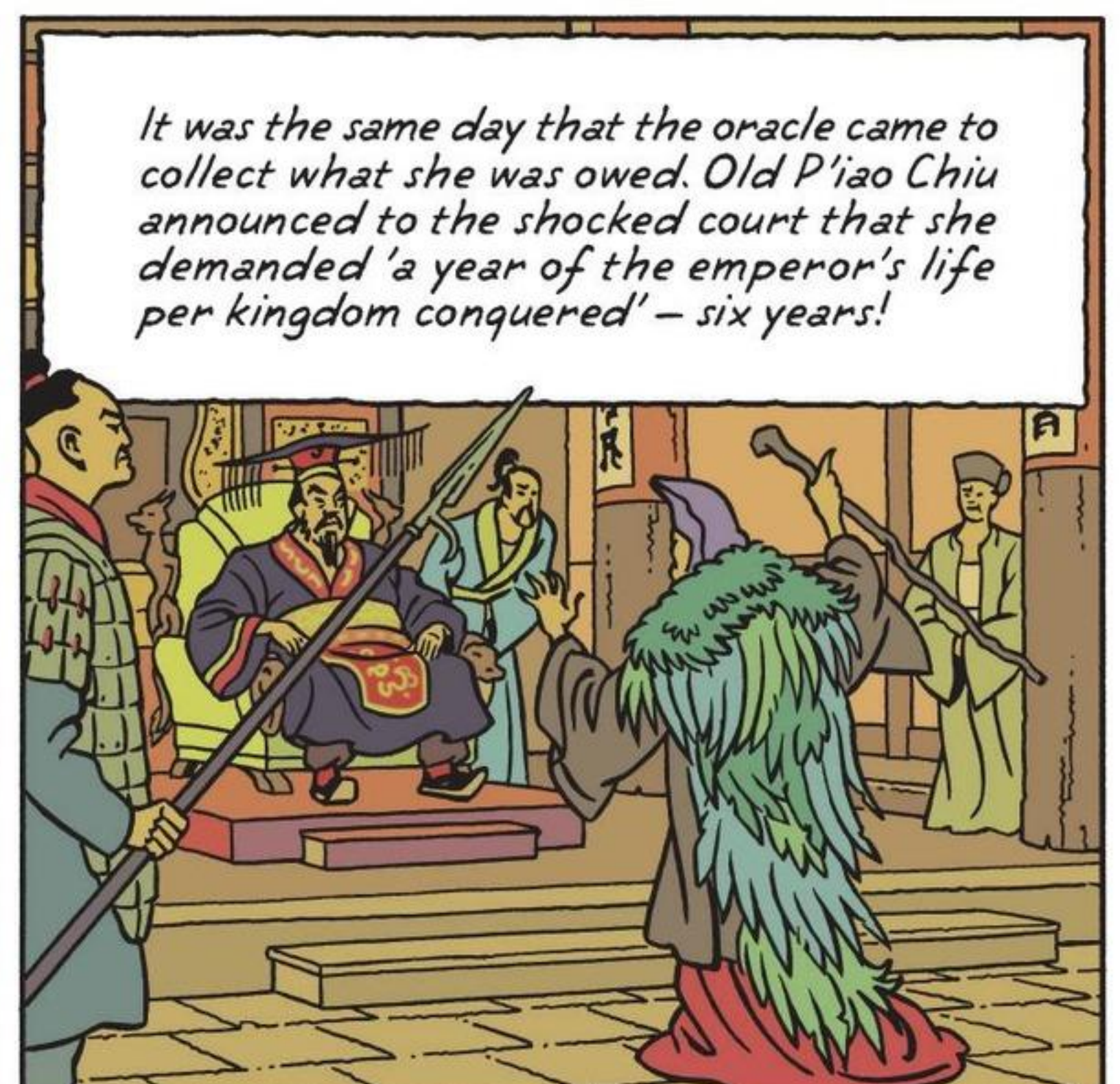
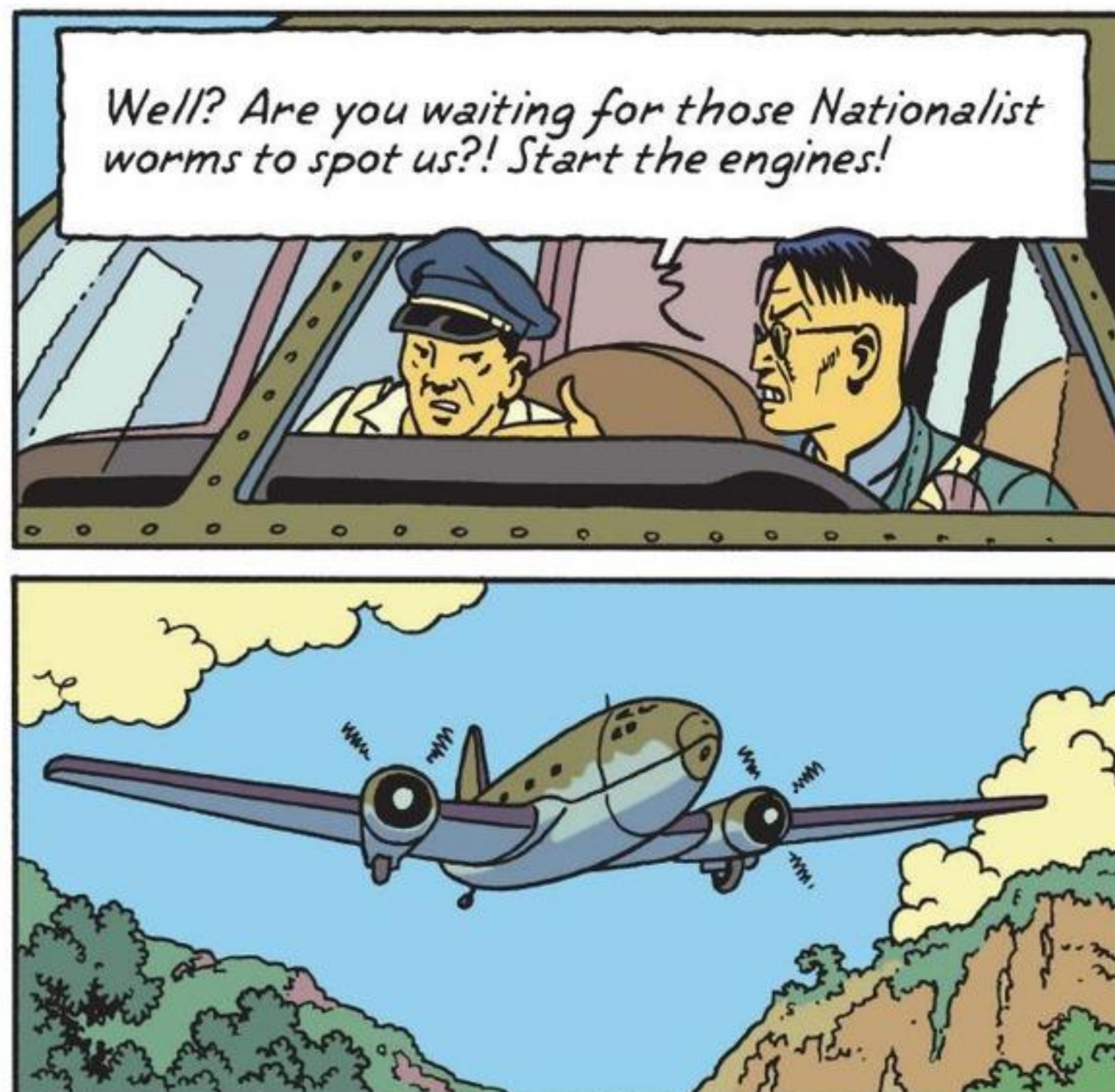
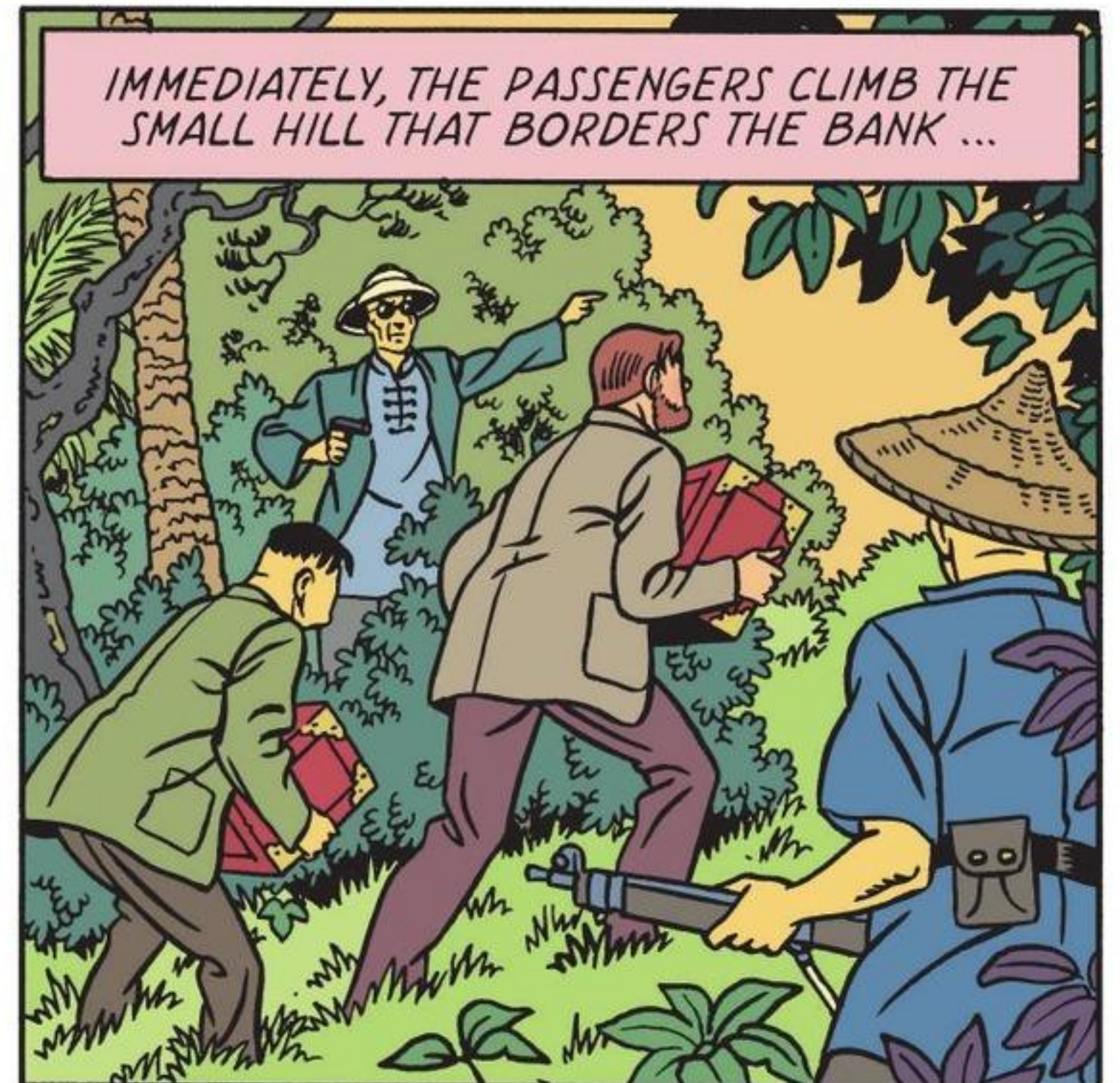
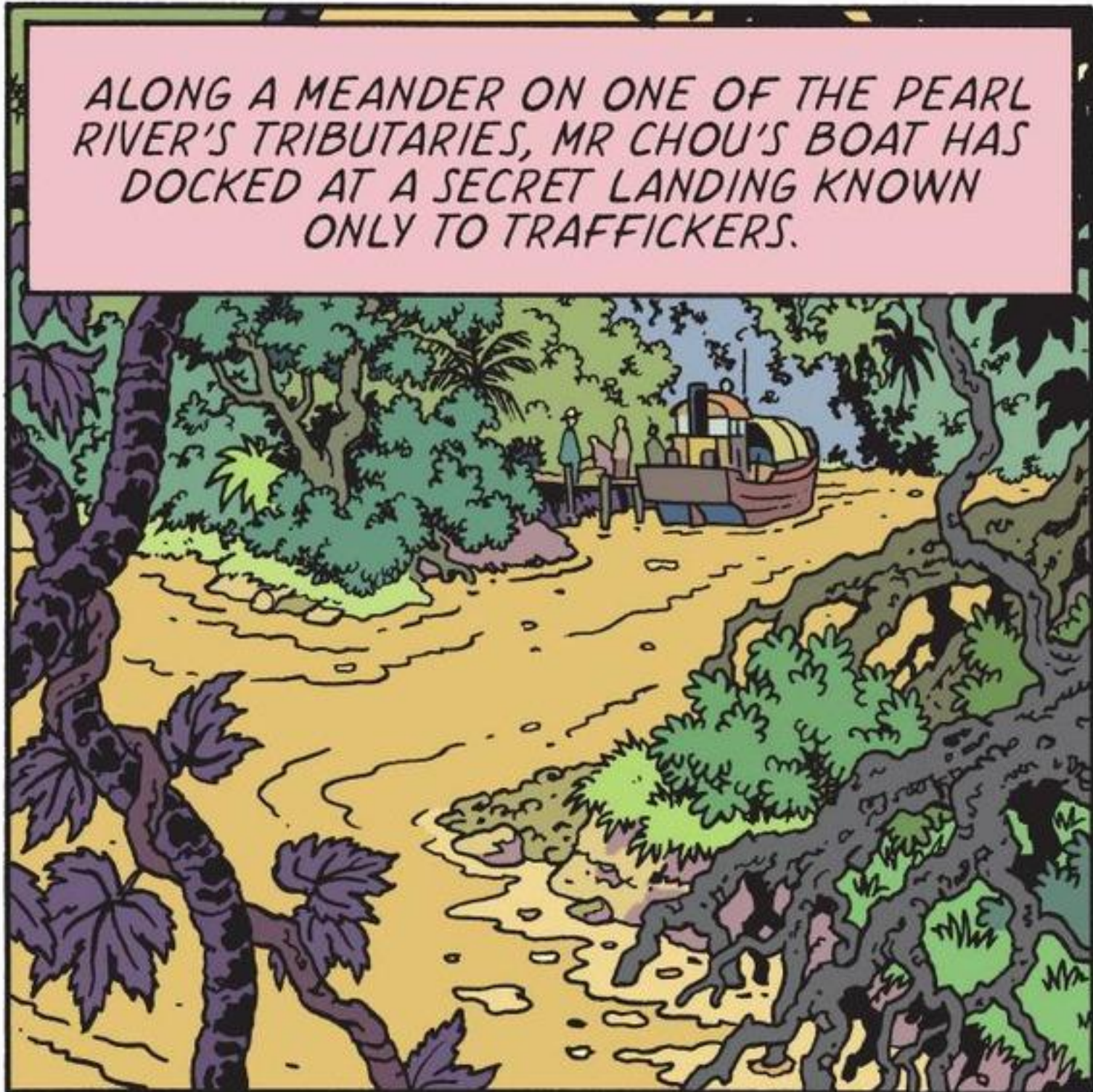


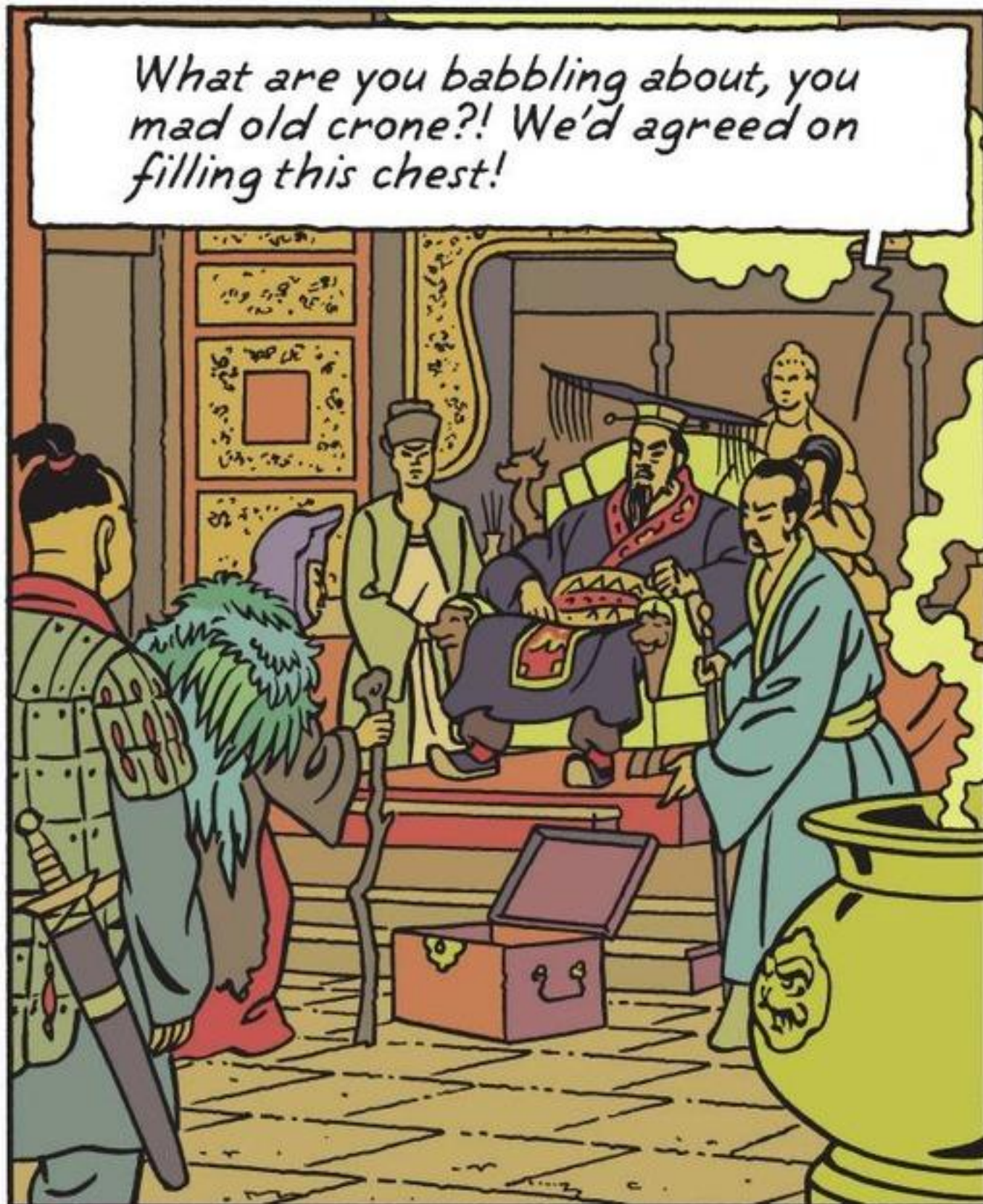
I'll go and look for him. If you see him again, tell him that I must speak with him and that it's urgent!

I will! For the moment, watch where you're going!

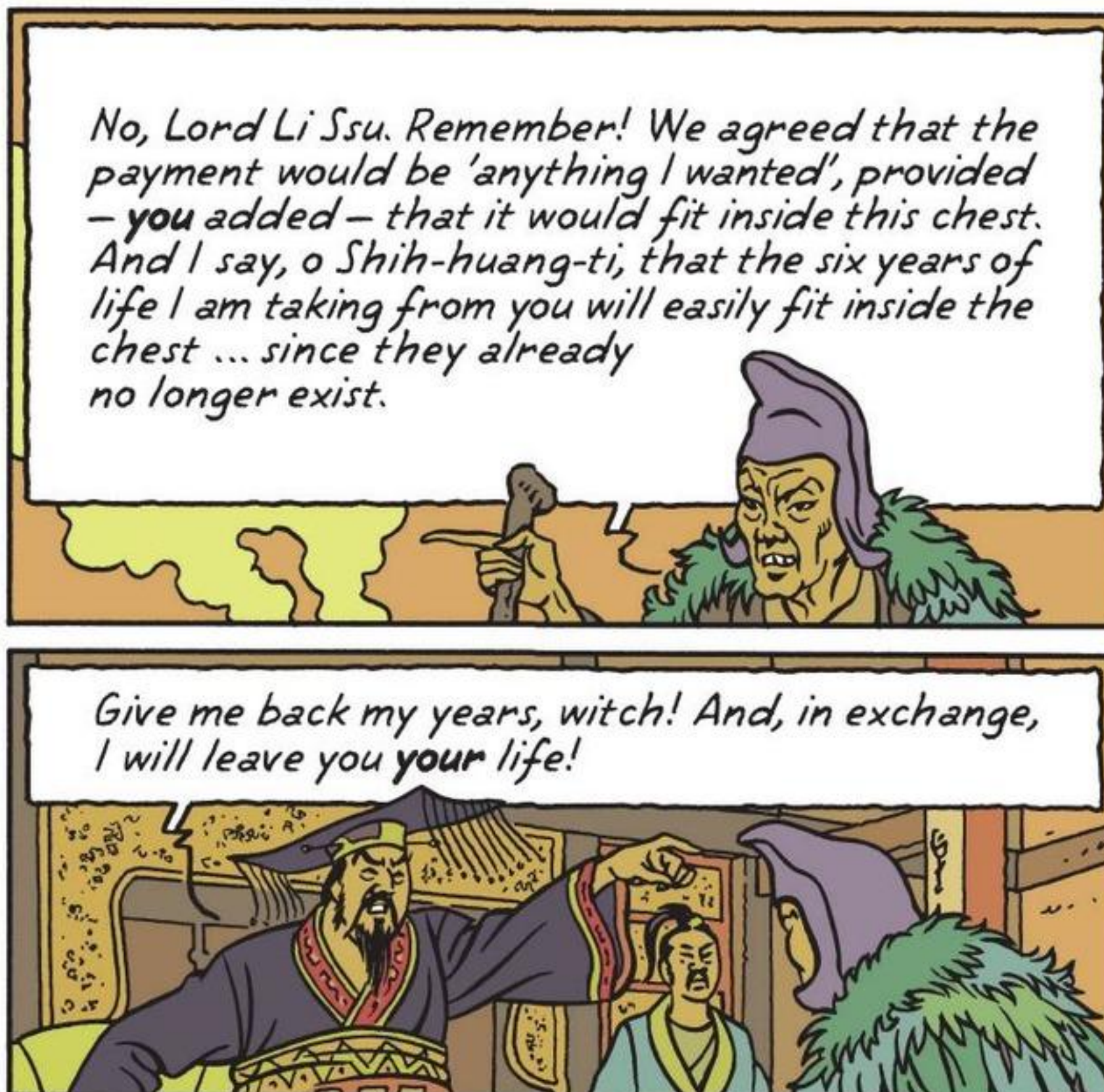






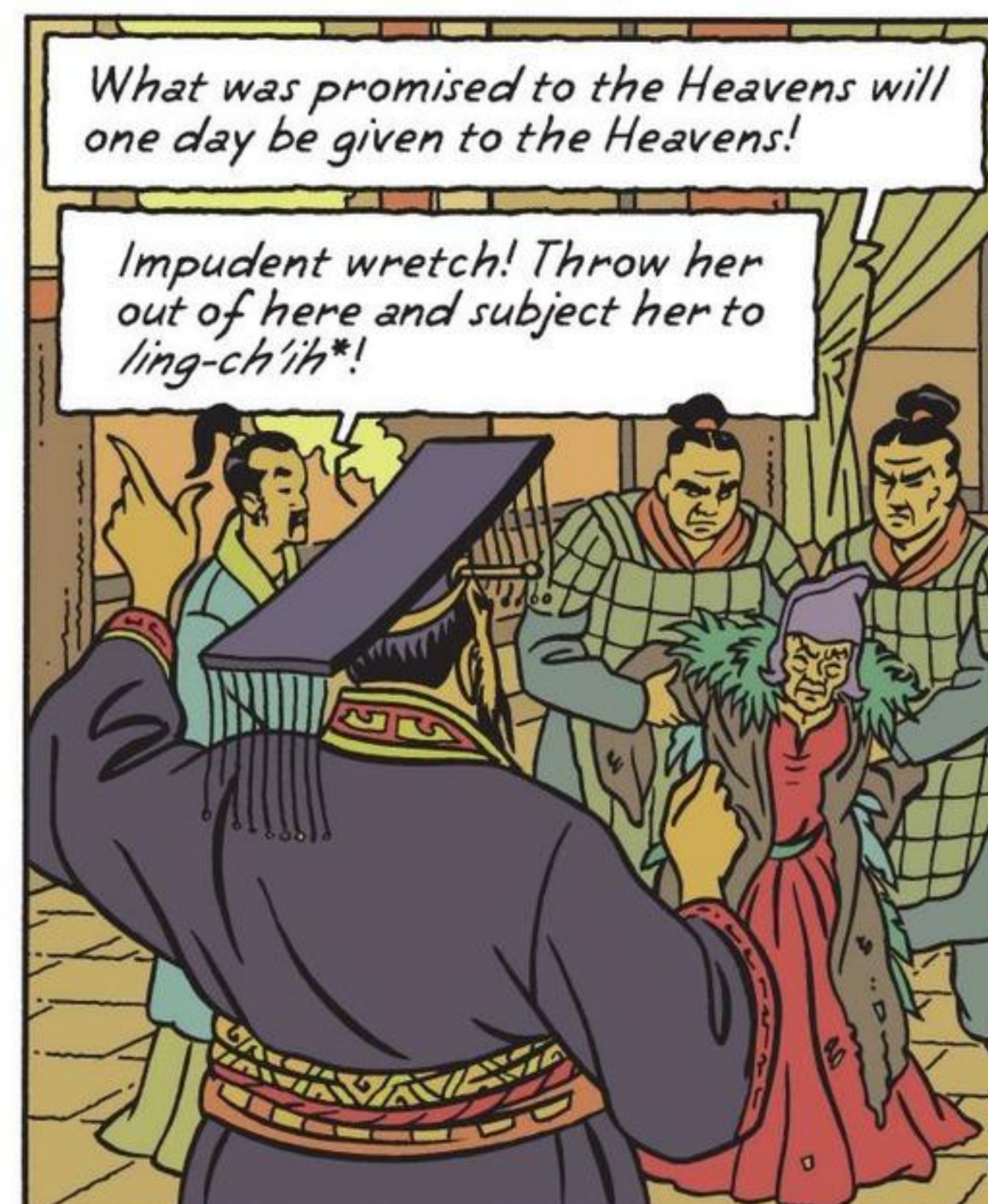


What are you babbling about, you mad old crone?! We'd agreed on filling this chest!



No, Lord Li Ssu. Remember! We agreed that the payment would be 'anything I wanted', provided — **you added** — that it would fit inside this chest. And I say, o Shih-huang-ti, that the six years of life I am taking from you will easily fit inside the chest ... since they already no longer exist.

Give me back my years, witch! And, in exchange, I will leave you **your** life!



What was promised to the Heavens will one day be given to the Heavens!

Impudent wretch! Throw her out of here and subject her to ling-ch'ih*!

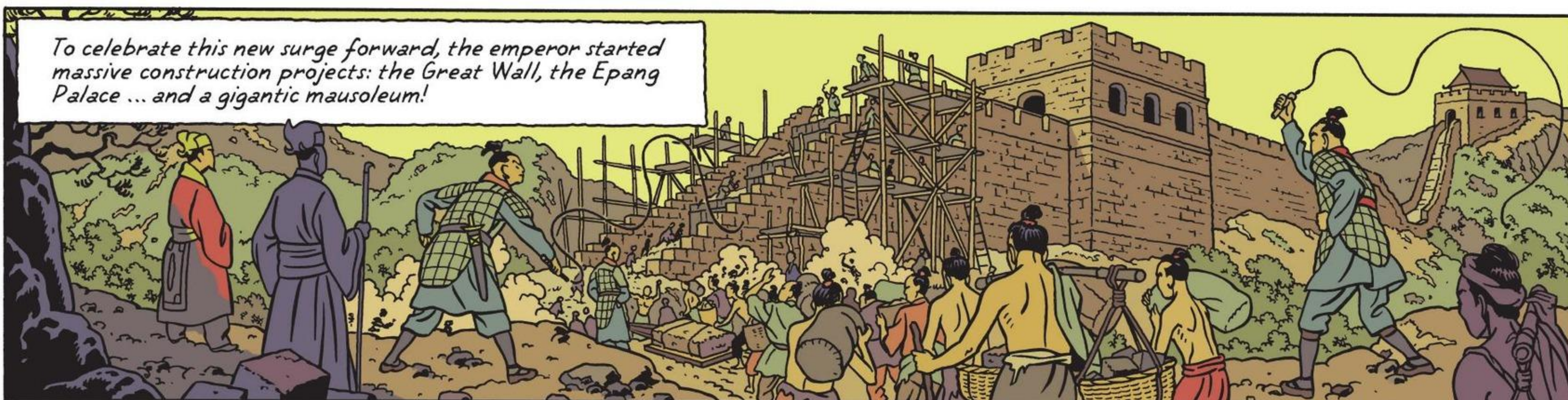
*ALSO KNOWN AS 'DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS'



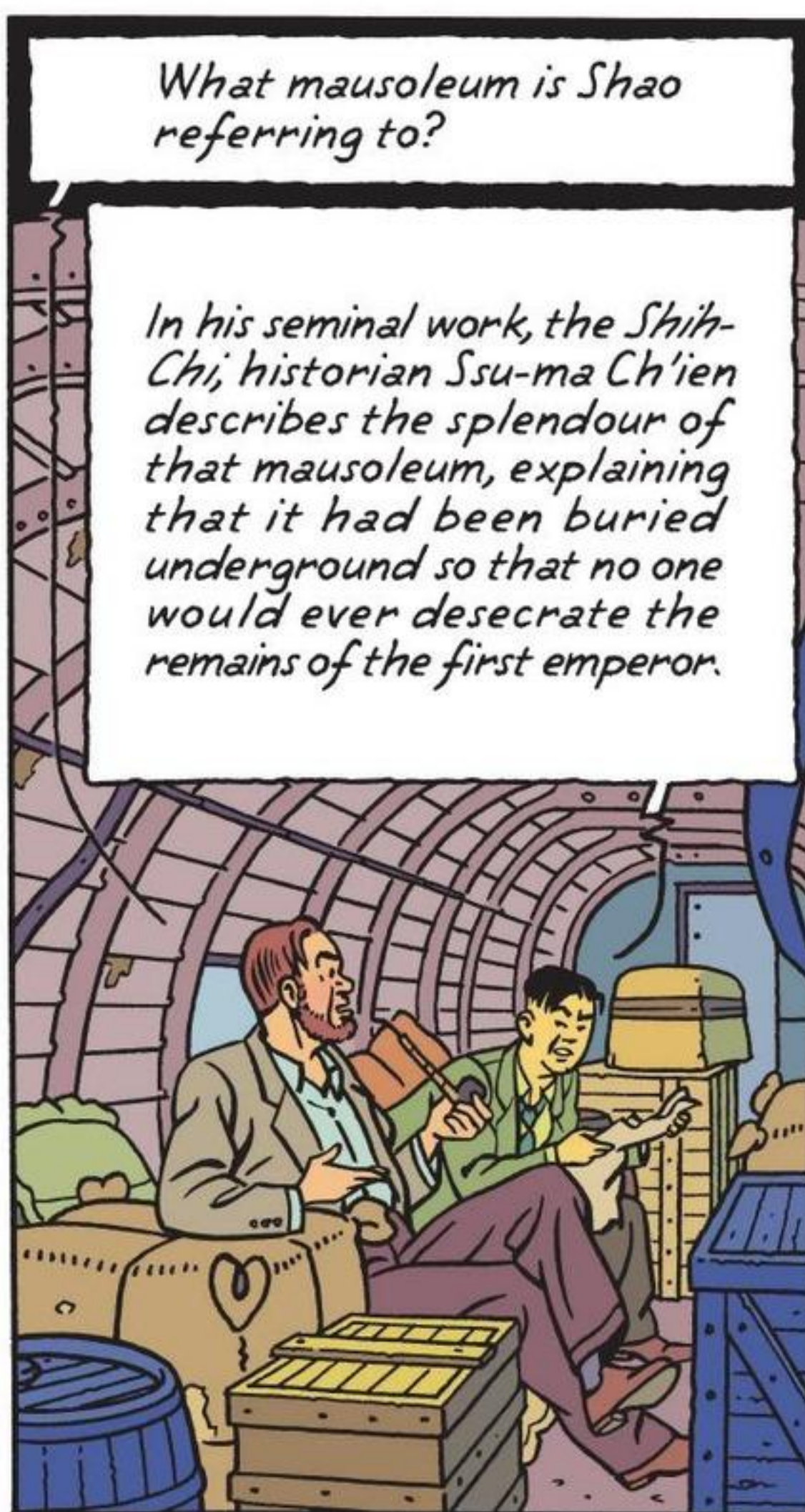
No one at the palace ever heard from the old witch again. A campaign of extensive law reform then began under the iron grip of the new administration.



The new emperor ordered all traces of the past to be burnt if they might cast a shadow on his accomplishments, for it was decreed that 'all had been darkness before the advent of Shih-huang-ti'! The birth of the new Empire of China was not a painless one.



To celebrate this new surge forward, the emperor started massive construction projects: the Great Wall, the Epang Palace ... and a gigantic mausoleum!



What mausoleum is Shao referring to?

In his seminal work, the *Shih-Chi*, historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien describes the splendour of that mausoleum, explaining that it had been buried underground so that no one would ever desecrate the remains of the first emperor.



To this day, archaeologists are still searching for it. Rumours claim that rivers of mercury run around the late king's sarcophagus and that thousands of armed warriors watch over him from hidden underground chambers ...

Goodness! I see that China is no more immune to the most extravagant legends than any other great civilisation ...

Laugh all you want, Professor! Ssu-ma Ch'ien is quite adamant, and I think that ...

... once you hear the rest, you won't—

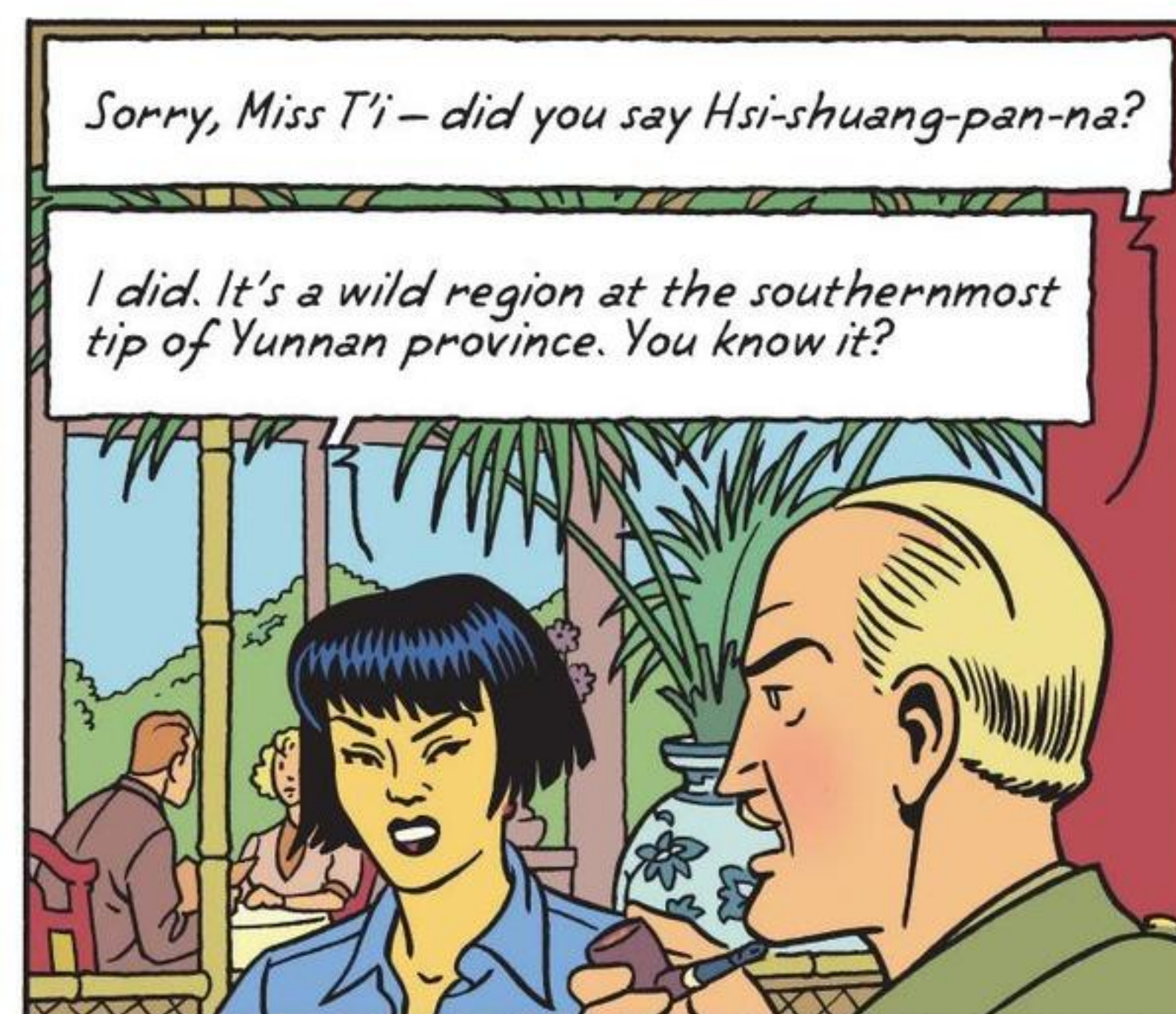
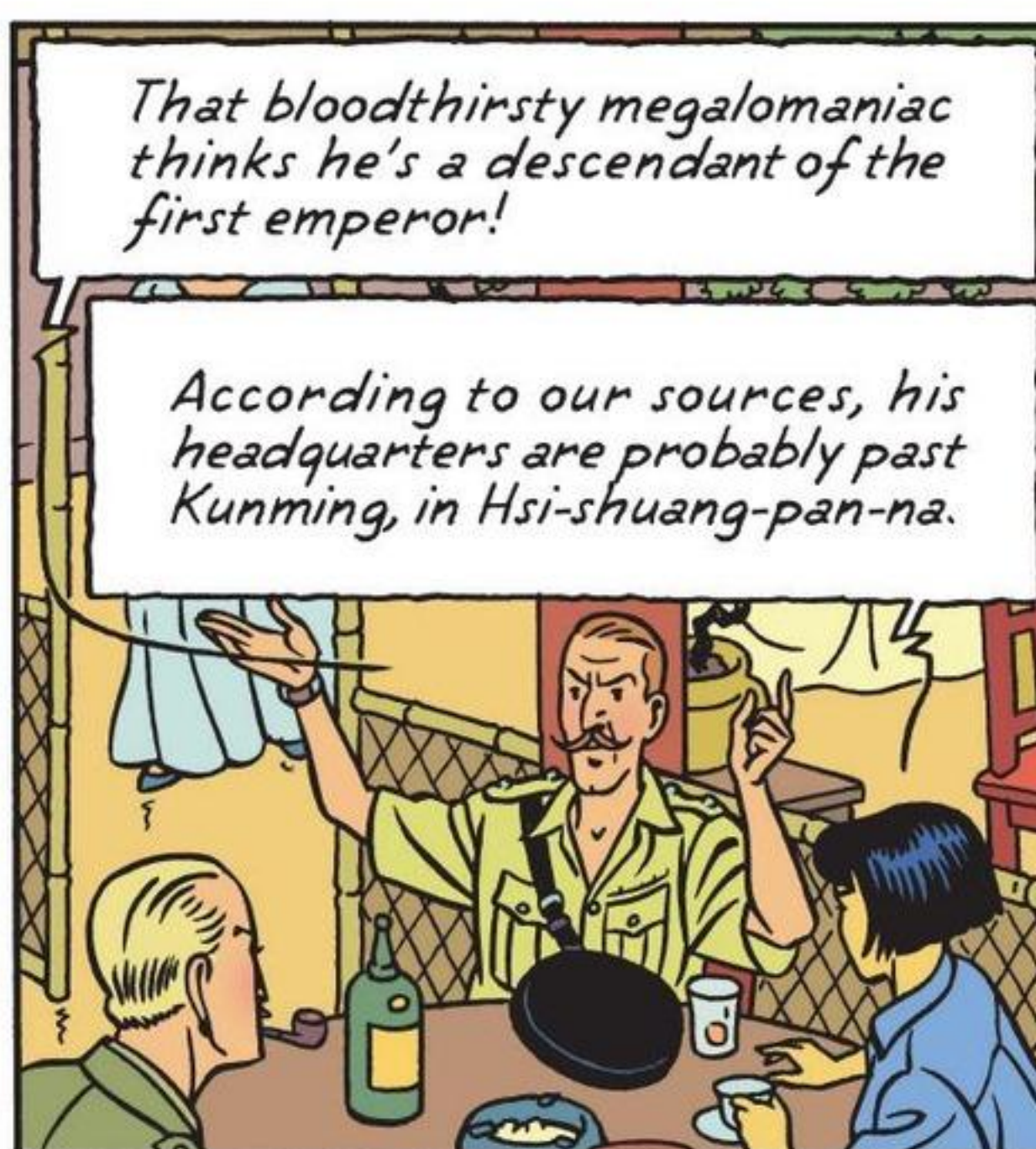
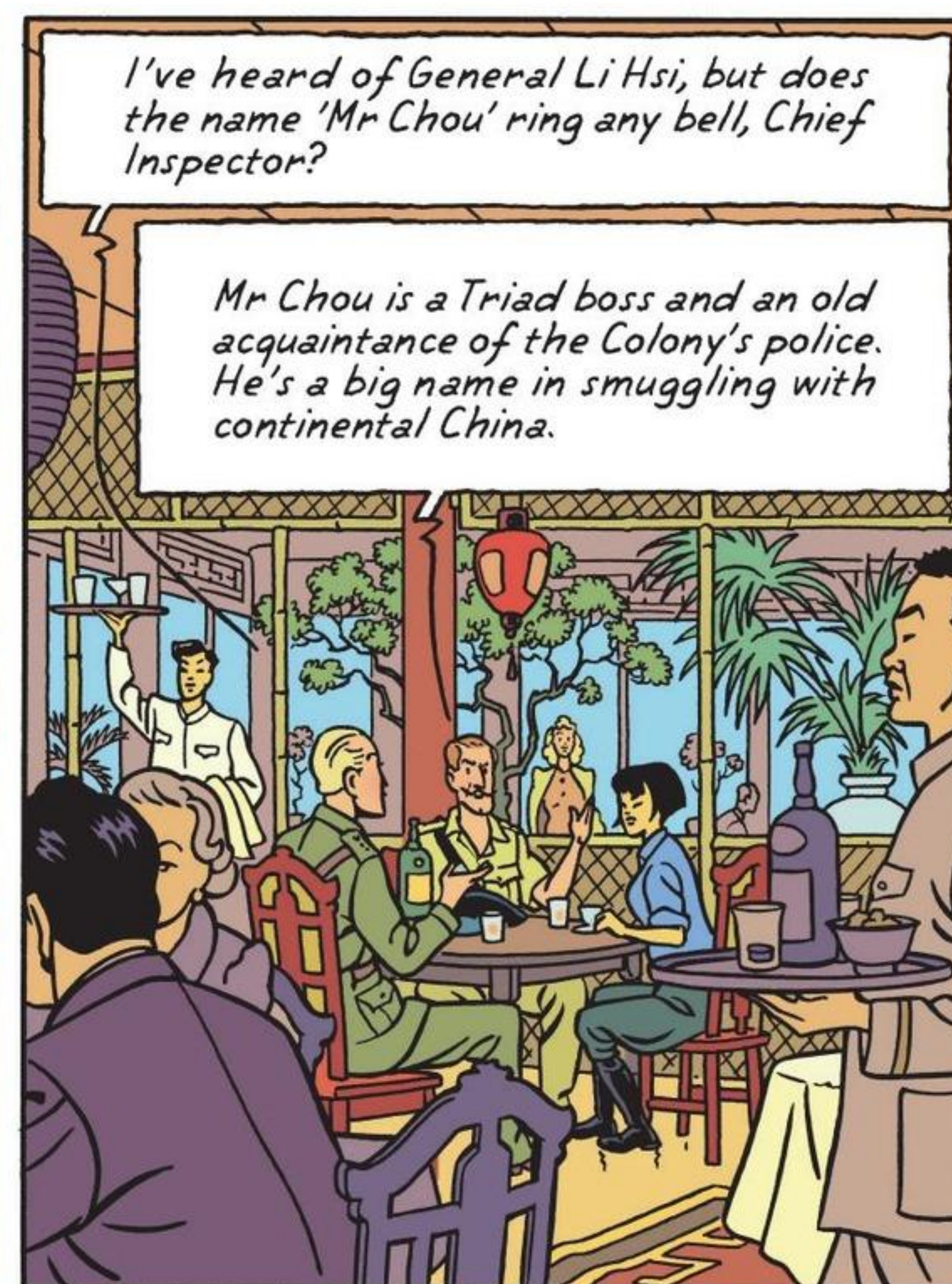
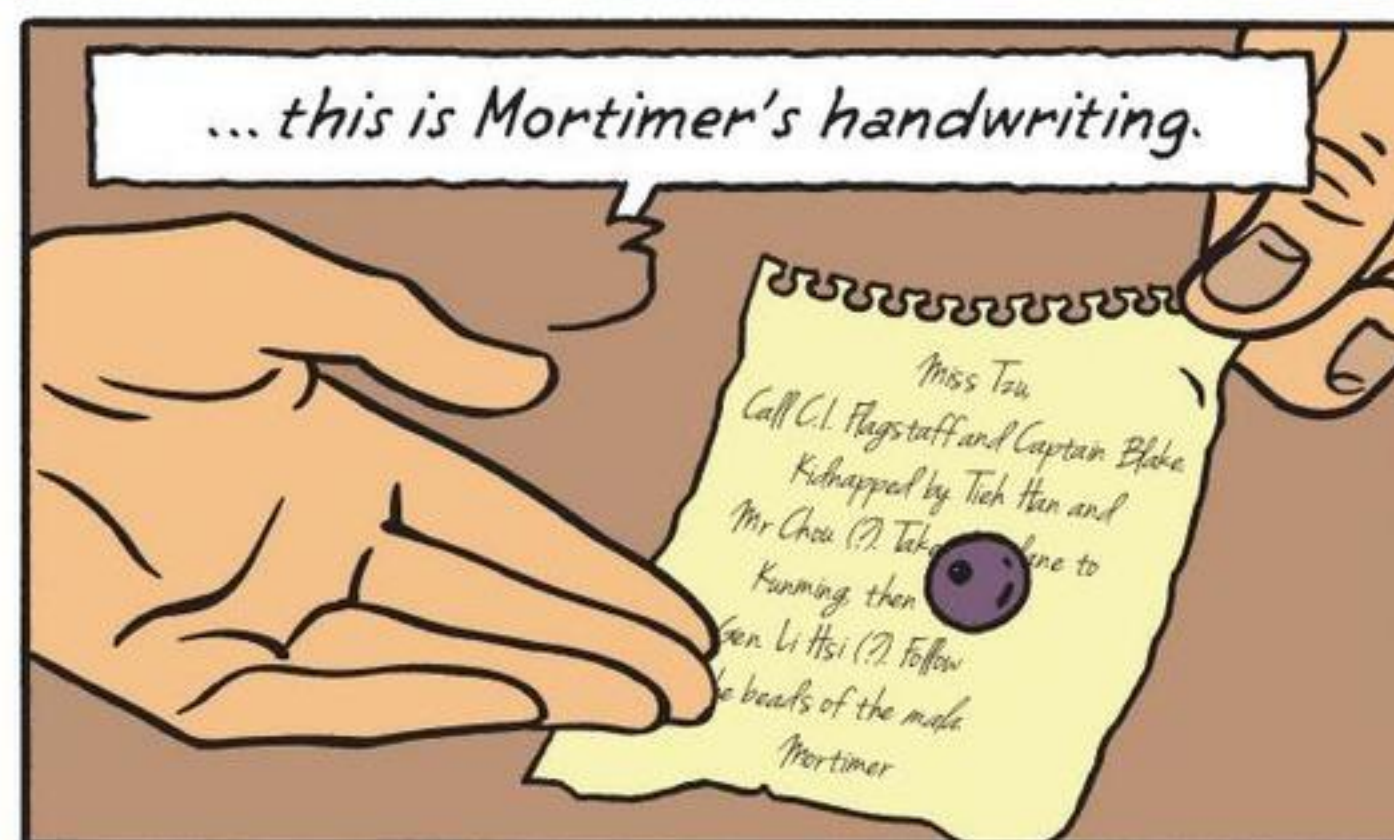
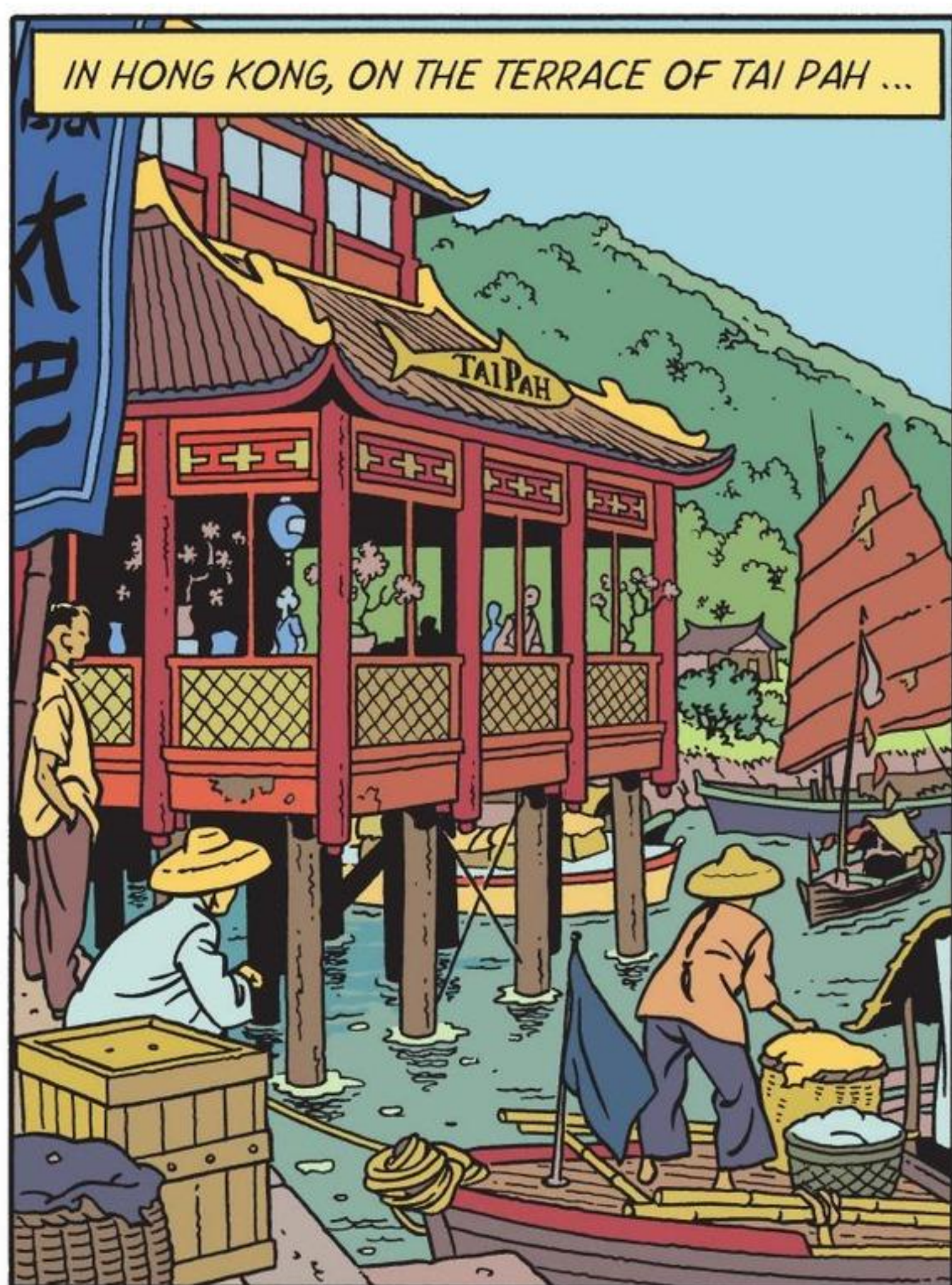


?!
Ow!



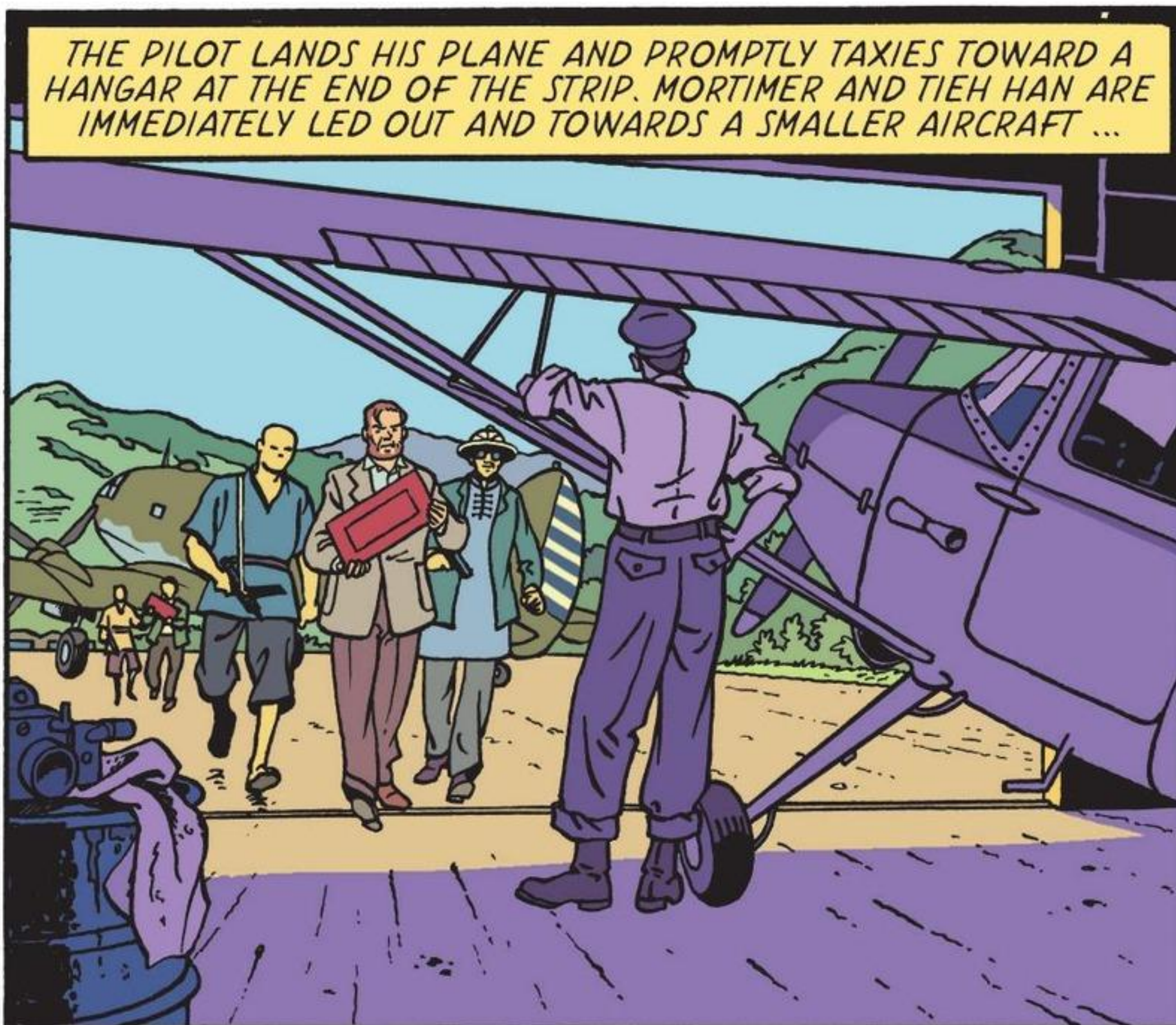
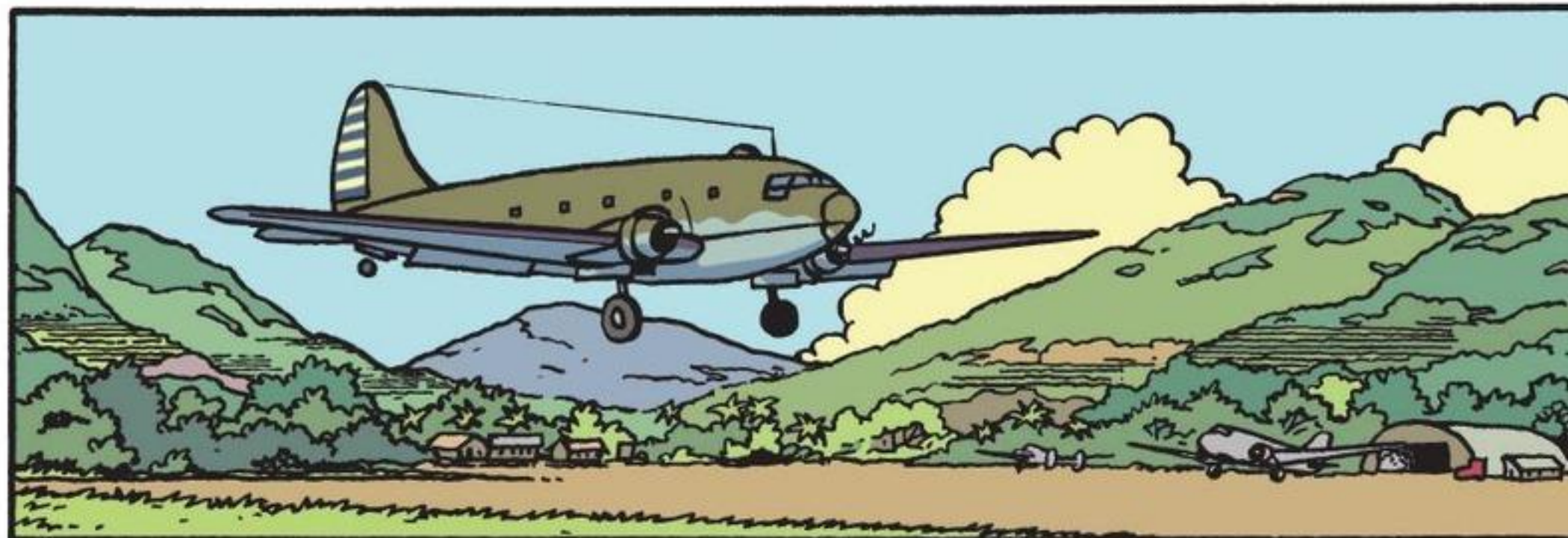
By the gods! What's happening?

Hang on to what you can! It looks like the pilot is preparing to land.





Look, Professor! Kunming – the City of Eternal Spring!



THE PILOT LANDS HIS PLANE AND PROMPTLY TAXIES TOWARD A HANGAR AT THE END OF THE STRIP. MORTIMER AND TIEH HAN ARE IMMEDIATELY LED OUT AND TOWARDS A SMALLER AIRCRAFT ...



ONCE AGAIN, THE PRISONERS ARE LOCKED INSIDE A TINY CARGO HOLD, AND THE CESSNA 170 TAKES OFF, HEADING SOUTH ...



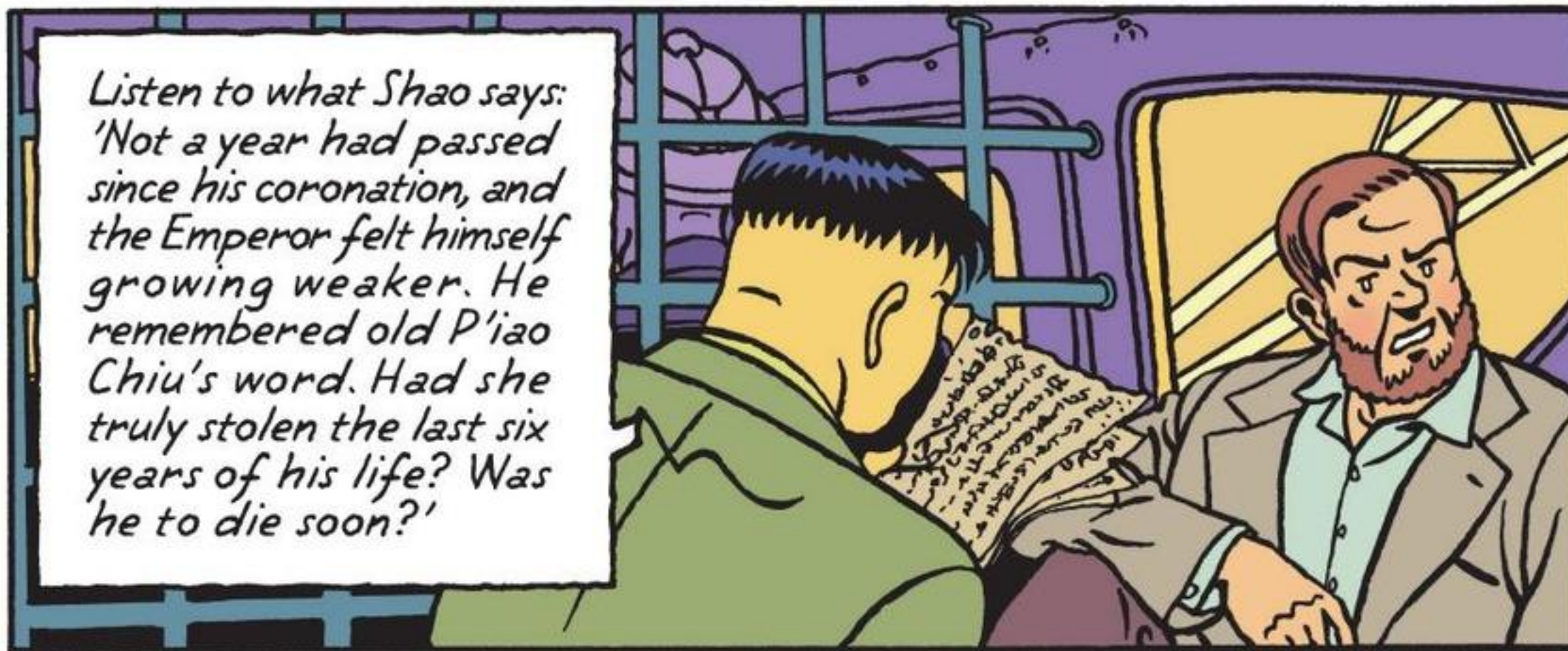
... OVER THE GORGEOUS MULTICOLOURED LANDSCAPE OF YUNNAN.

Off we go again, and who knows for how long this time? Continue the story, Mr Tieh.



Shao mentions a peculiar fact that was also found in Ssu-ma Ch'ien's work: Emperor Shih-huang-ti suffered from what can only be called a phobia of death. He wanted to achieve immortality at any cost.

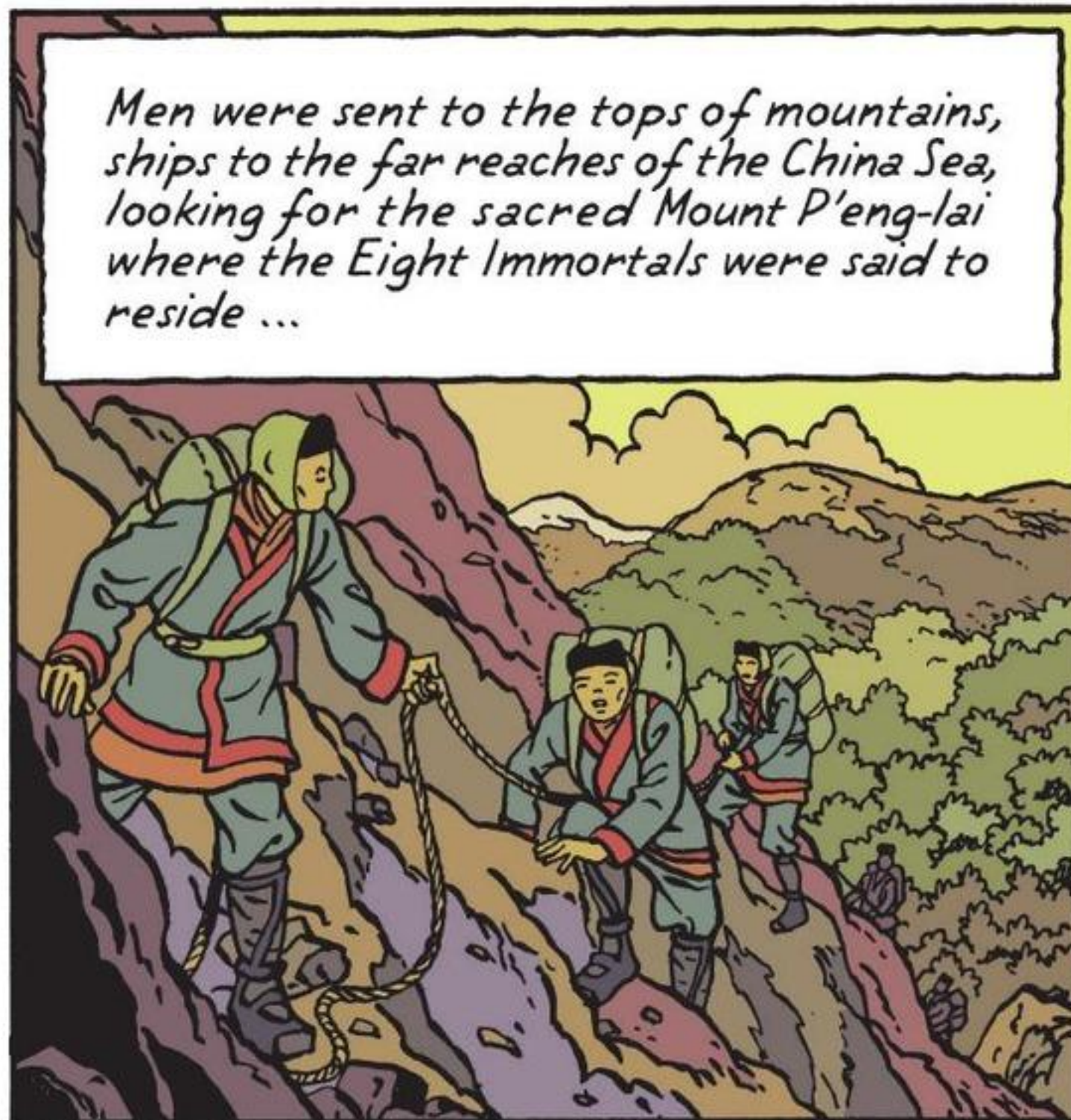
Immortality! The mirage that's haunted men since the dawn of time ...



Listen to what Shao says: 'Not a year had passed since his coronation, and the Emperor felt himself growing weaker. He remembered old P'iao Chiu's word. Had she truly stolen the last six years of his life? Was he to die soon?'



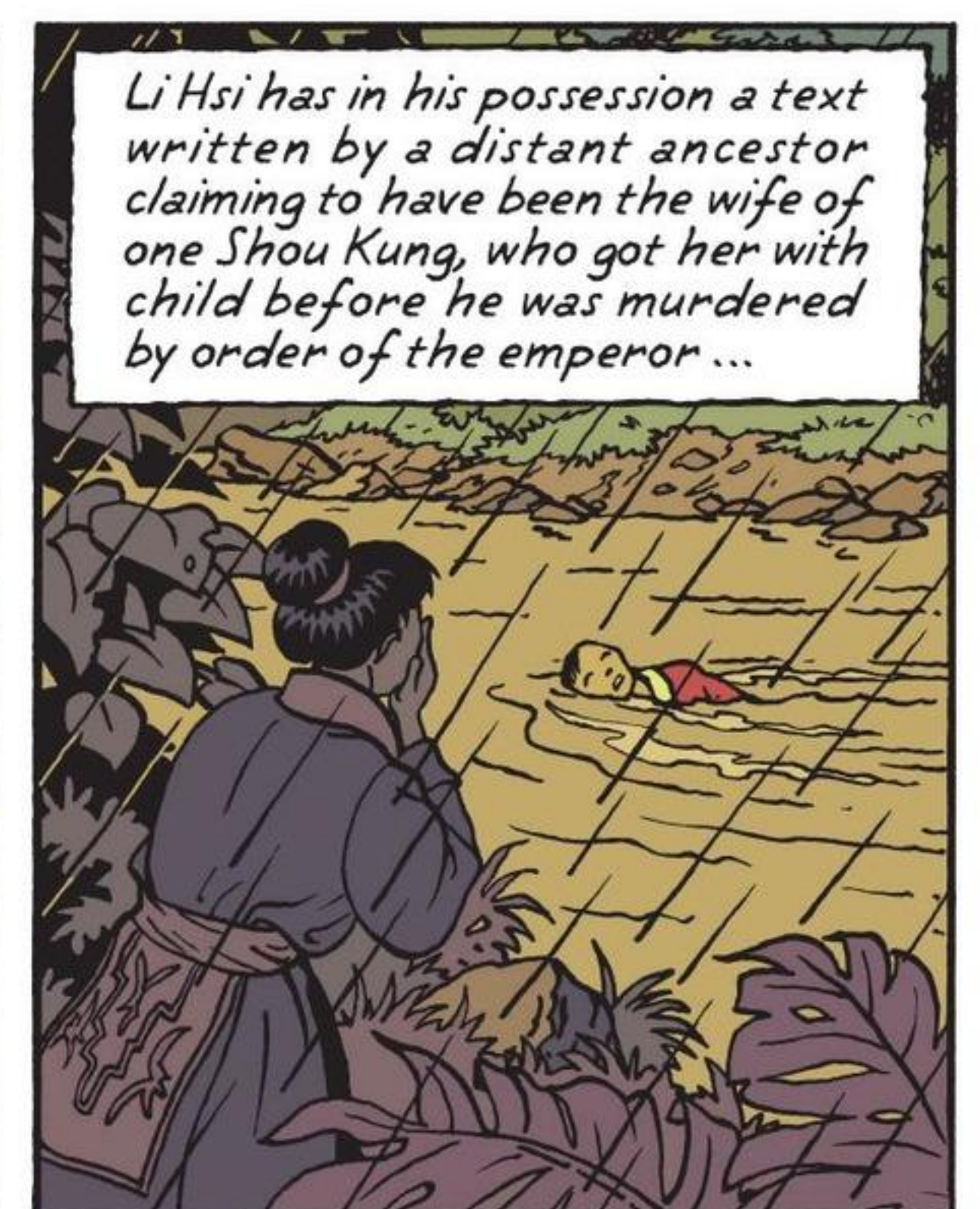
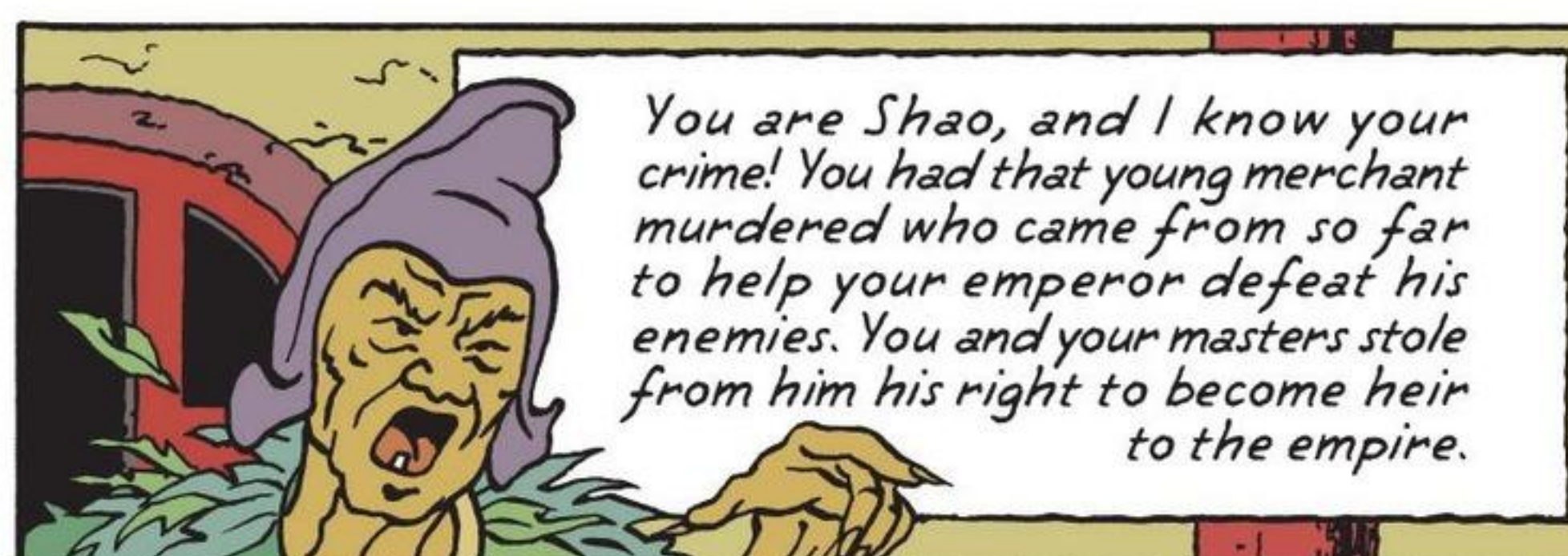
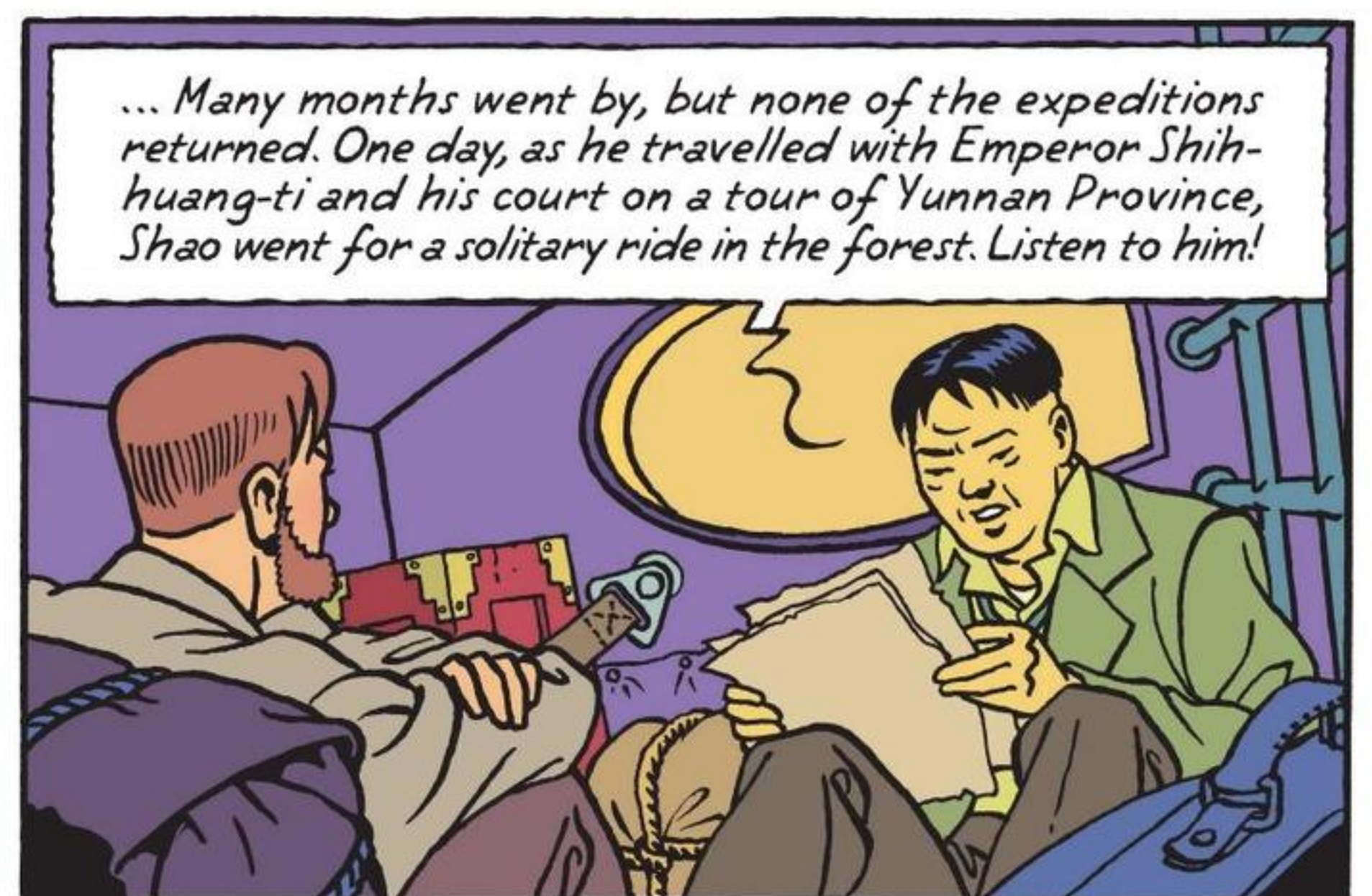
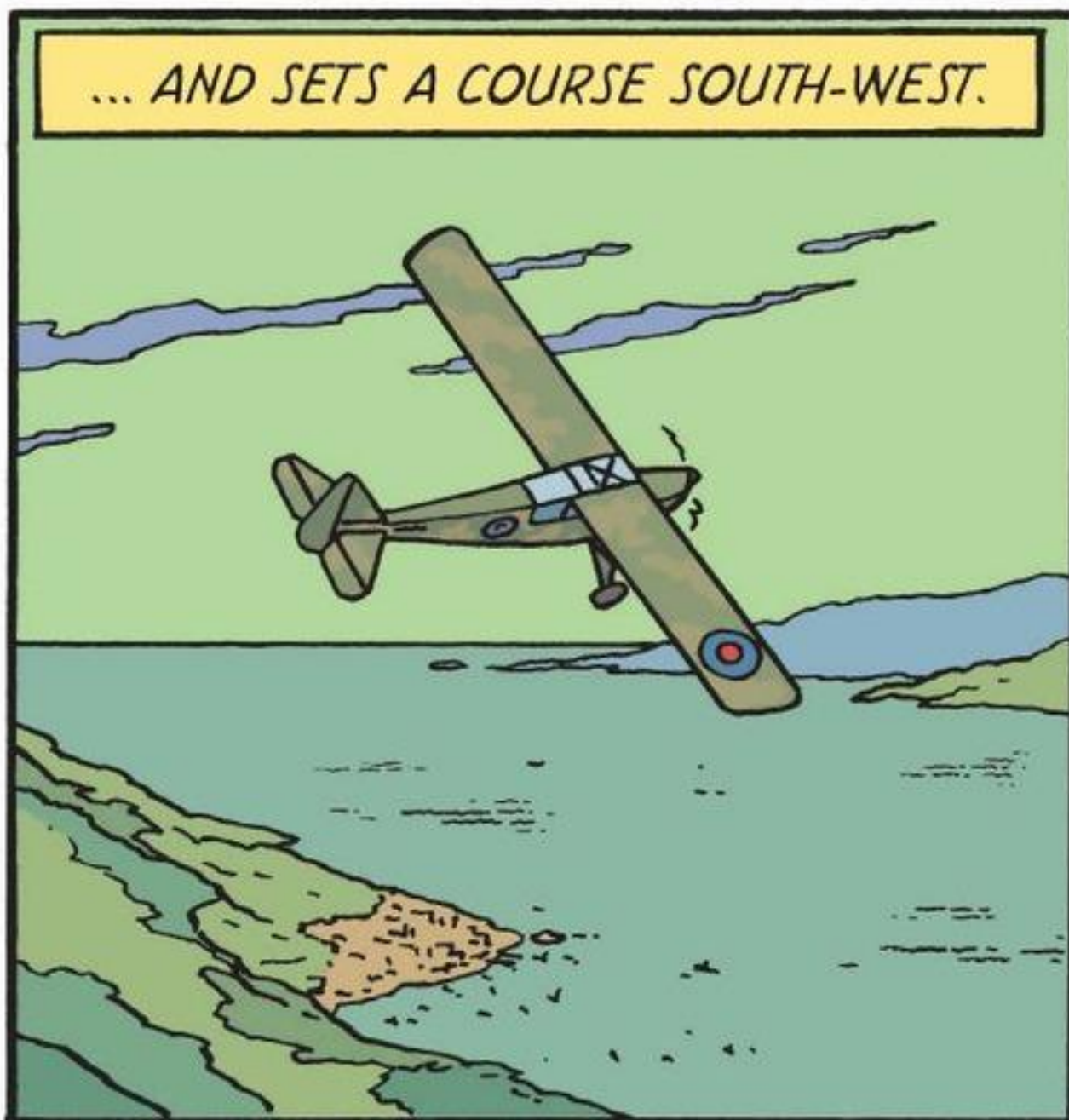
Shih-huang-ti badgered his chancellor, Li Ssu, and his advisors: they must send expeditions to seek the Valley of the Immortals found in the legends of his ancestors!



Men were sent to the tops of mountains, ships to the far reaches of the China Sea, looking for the sacred Mount P'eng-lai where the Eight Immortals were said to reside ...



AT THAT MOMENT, AT KAI TAK AIRPORT, CAPTAIN BLAKE AND MISS T'I BOARD A SMALL RAF PLANE ...



To Li Hsi's mind, as the last descendant of that woman, that text afforded him the Heavens' blessing on his claim to the imperial throne of China. He needed more solid evidence, though – and here it is, in Shao's manuscript!

Incredible! Go on; keep reading.



Now the Son of Heaven is about to go and join his ancestors ... but he is afraid he'll have to pay for his crime and betrayal. And you ... You're afraid he will take you with him!

I beg you, Oracle! If you can save him, do so. This time, I swear we will force the emperor to grant all of your wishes. I swear it on my own head.



Ha! Ha! Ha! Arrogant fool! As if your head had any value! Take me to Shih-huang-ti, and ... we'll see.



And so he did.

Tell me what I must do to survive this ailment, Oracle. Aside from my life, you will have anything you want.



I put myself in the gods' hands.



Somewhere, in a valley that men have forgotten for ever, live the 'Eaters of Emeralds'.



It is they who produce the Pearls of Eternal Life you seek. They live far, far from here. Starting from my hut, you must travel up the Thousandth Arm of the Mekong to its source.



Then you must follow the Carpet of Monkey Faces, cross the Forest of Stone, then the Domain of the Black-eyed White Gods, until you reach the cave of the Womb of Heaven at the foot of the Red Mountain.



How long will that journey take? I feel so weak already ...

Hmmm ... It is true. You clearly look poorly ...



I will chant incantations to contact the Immortals and ask them to send us a messenger. With his help, you will be able to reach the Valley of the Immortals in a single day. There will be a price to pay, though, and a small condition to fulfil ...

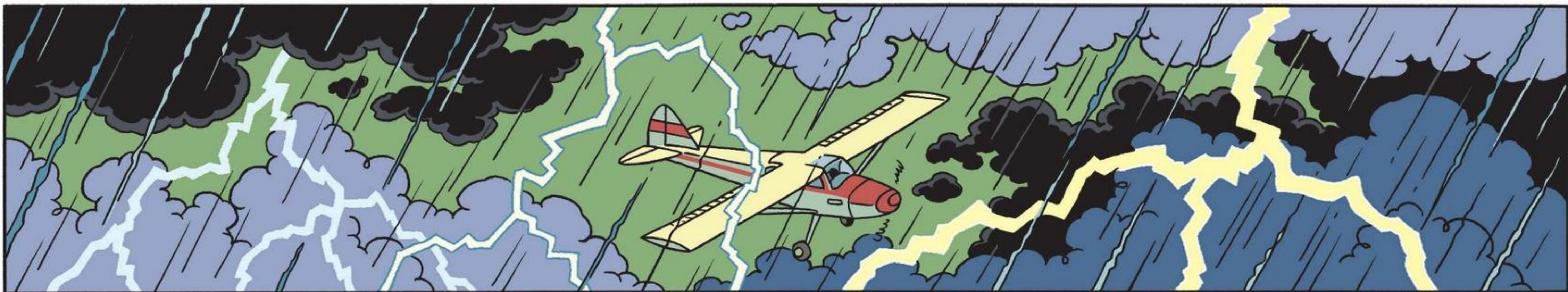
Excellent! Contact them! I will give them anything they demand!



We're in for a rough time! You'd better tell your prisoners to hang on tight ...

Don't worry about them and concentrate on your flight path.





Oh, no! It's a storm! We must land! We must—

Calm down, Tieh Han! The best way to avoid panic and airsickness is to think of something else. Continue the story.

Where was I? ... Oh, yes ... Old P'iao Chiu explained to the emperor that, on top of the small condition to be fulfilled on arrival, the 'Eaters' would demand 10,000 emeralds. The emperor was to bring the gems to her hut that very night.

Ten thousand emeralds?! You go too far, crone!

It is the Immortals' food ... Is it too high a price for eternal life, Son of Heaven?

No! Hurry up and call that messenger. That's all I'm asking ...

Li Ssu, if I haven't returned in three days, I'm entrusting you with running the empire. You will pretend to bury my body in the mausoleum, with all the pomp and rituals we had planned.

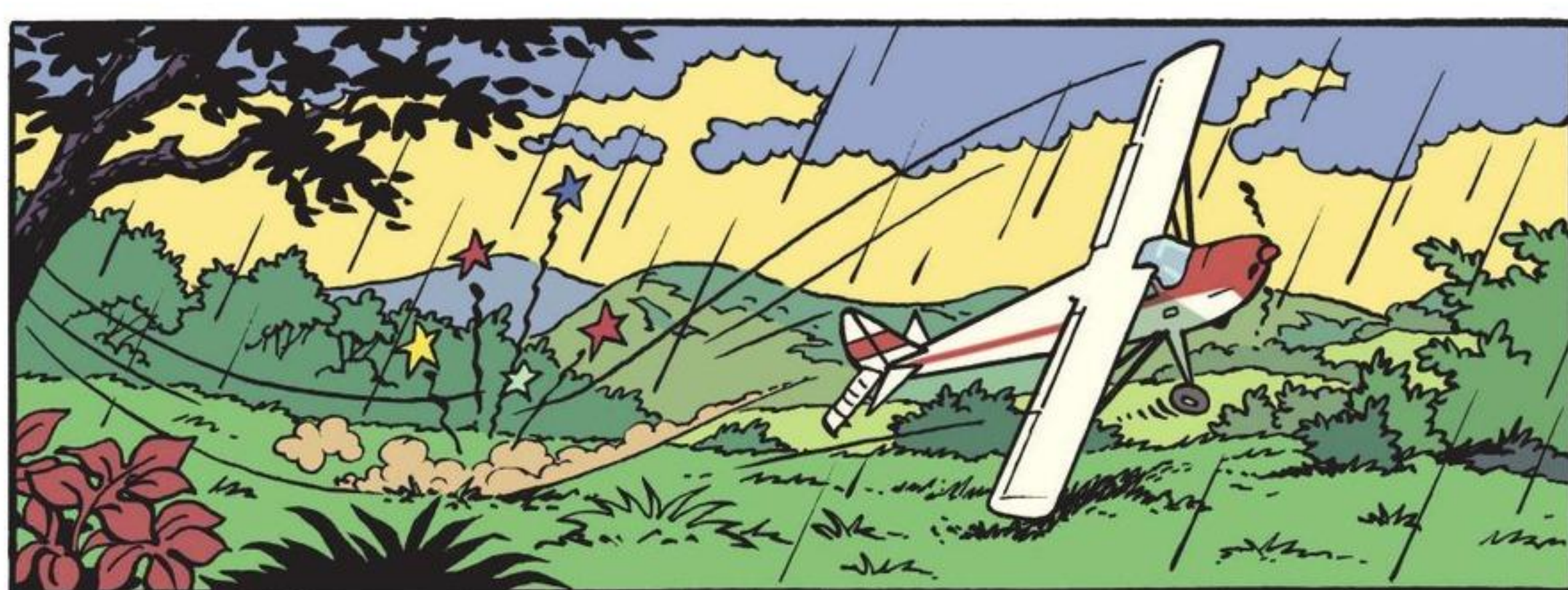
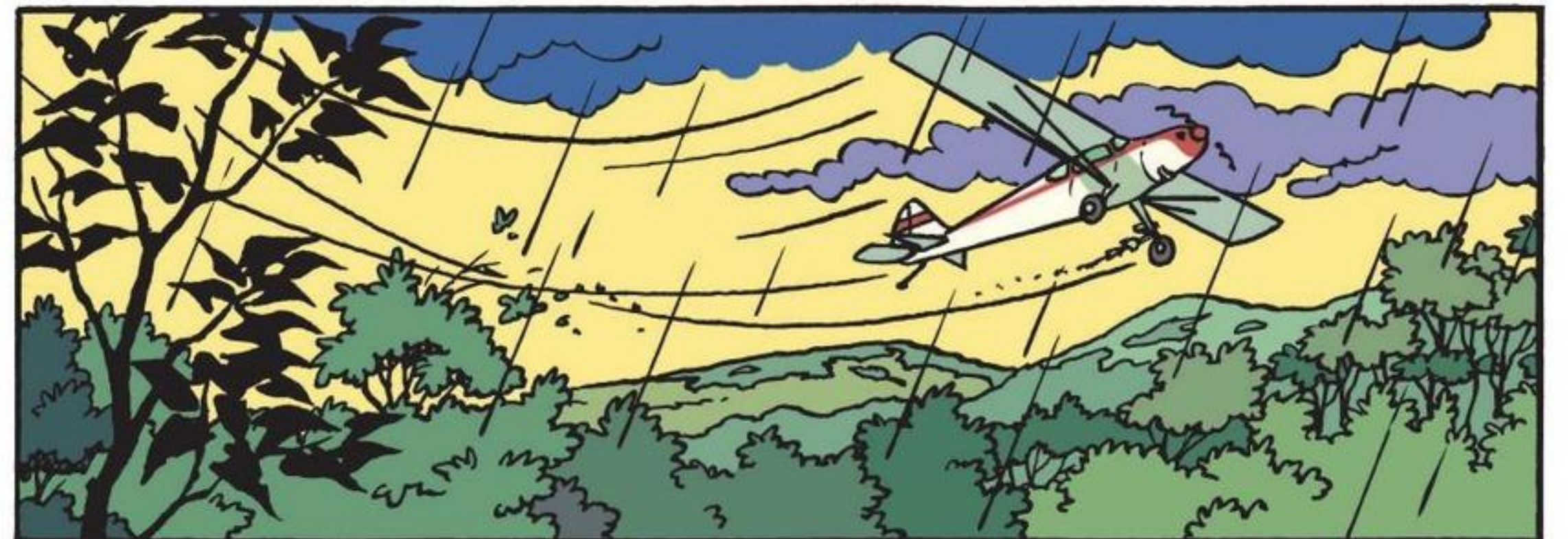
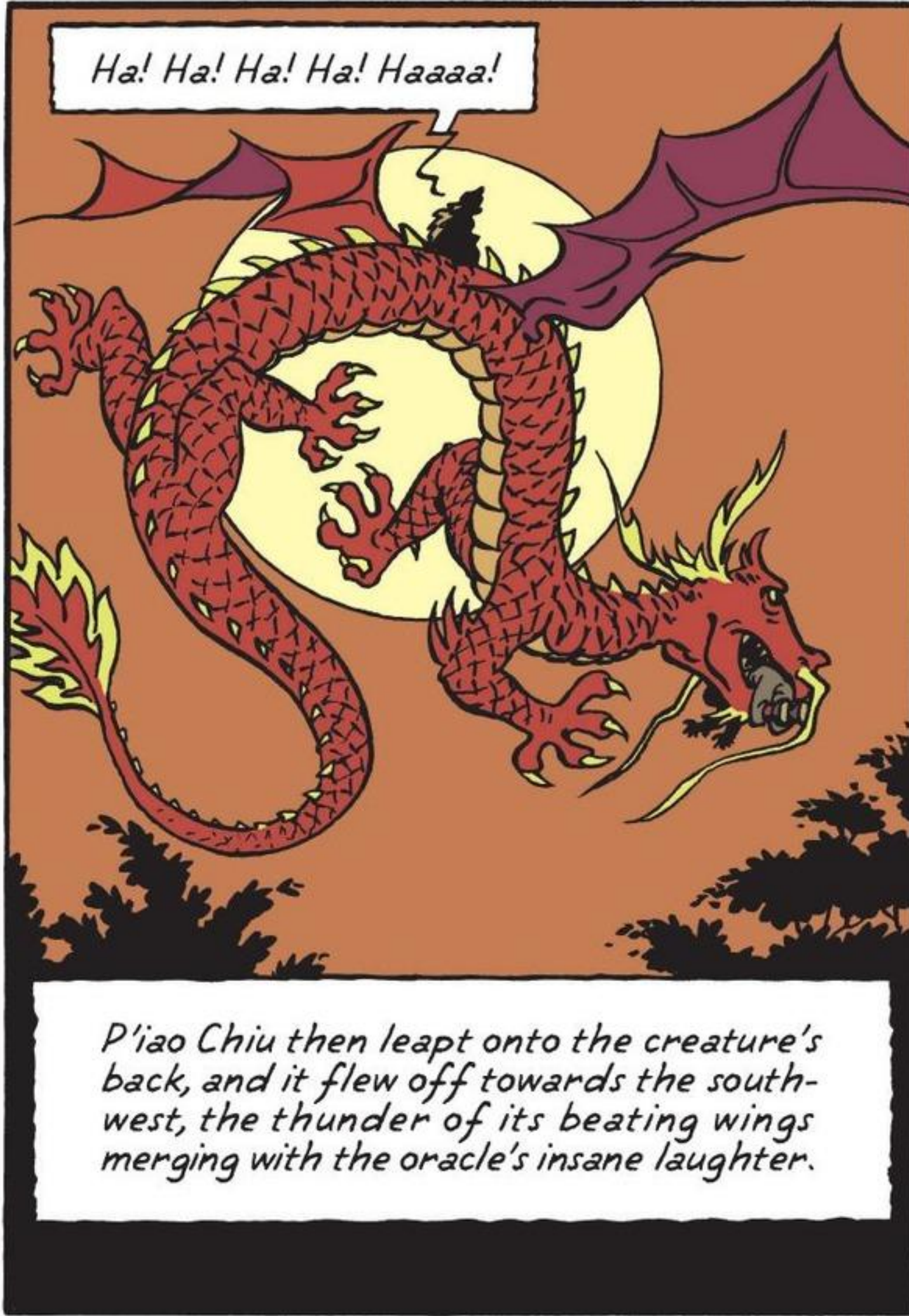
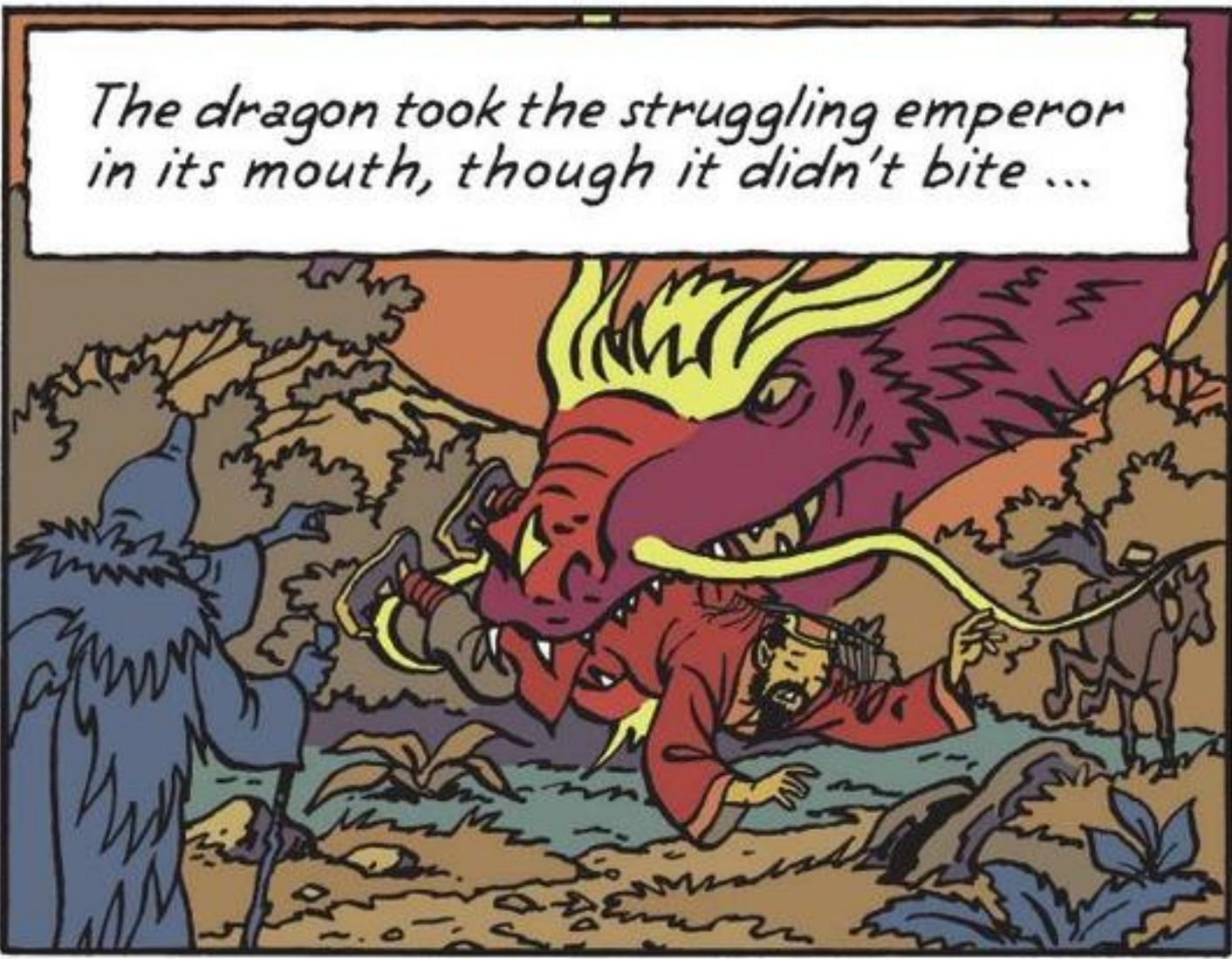
Then you will cover the tomb's entrance with earth and grass so that it will be invisible and inaccessible. Finally, you will make sure my son ascends the throne. I'm counting on you.

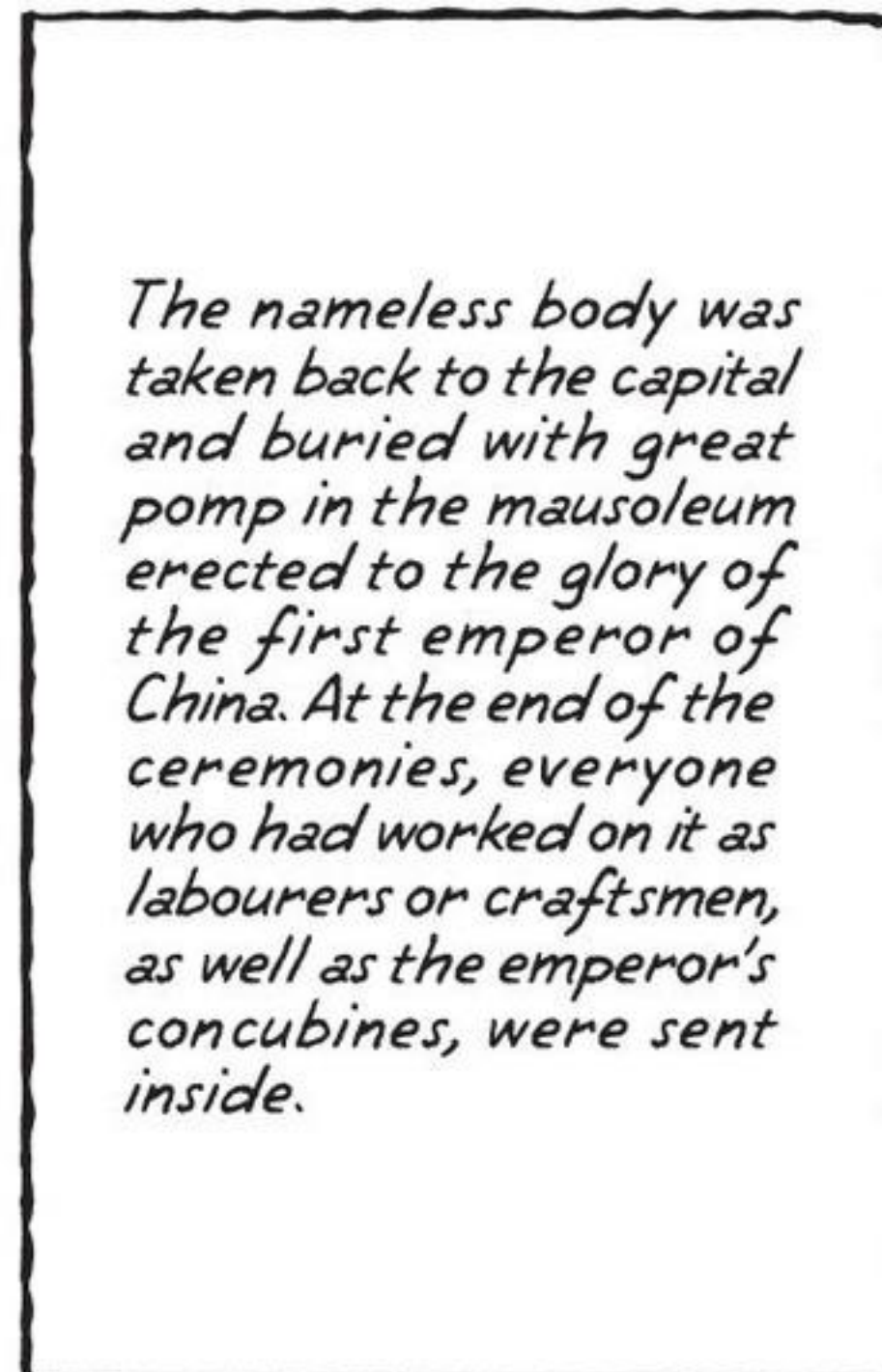
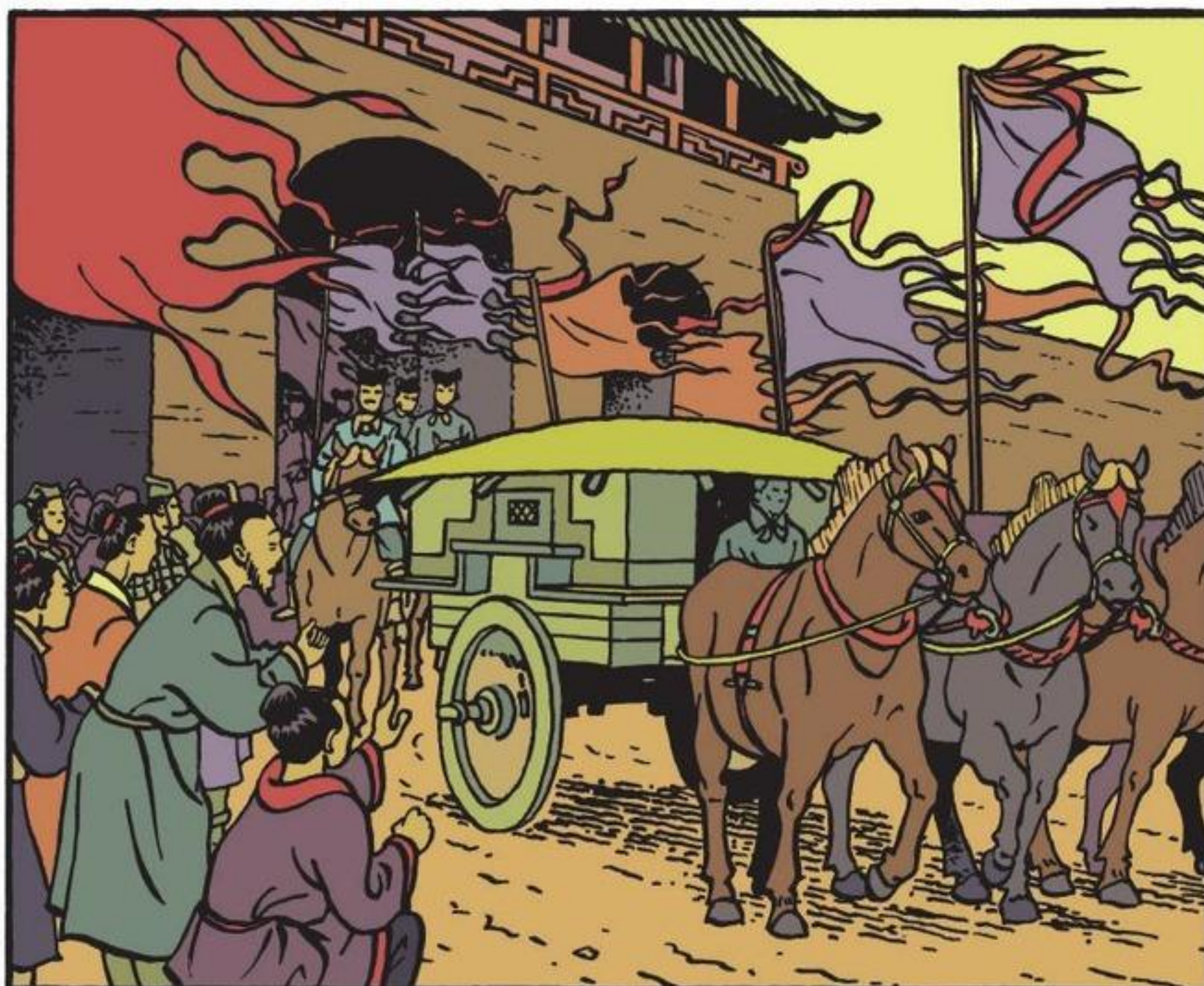
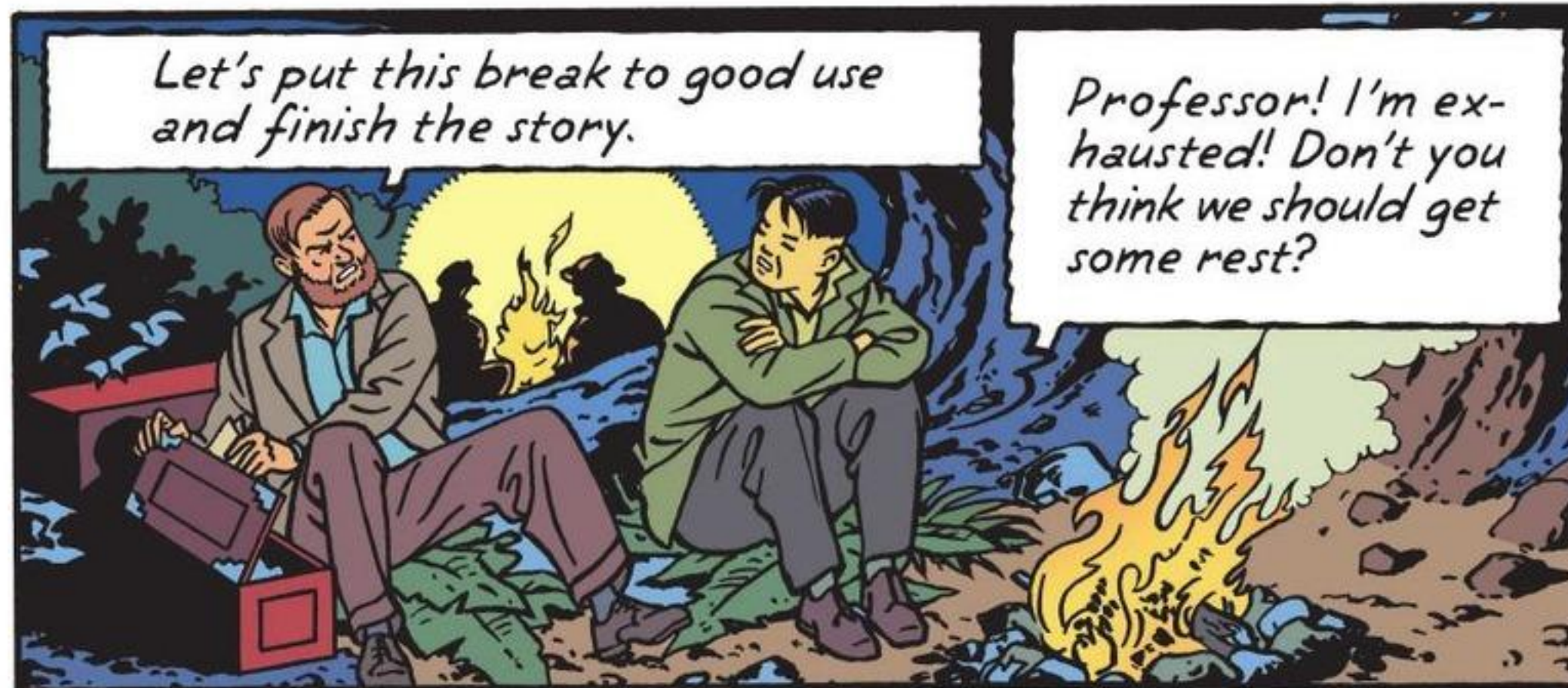
That same night, the emperor took the emeralds and rode to the oracle's hut. Shao had followed him, and he crept close so he could listen.

I hope for your sake that every single stone is there. The messenger will arrive soon.

Shao adds: 'At that moment, a moving shadow far swifter than a cloud eclipsed the light of the moon. Frightened, I looked up, and froze in astonishment at what I saw.'

A dragon had spilt from the heavens and landed next to P'iao Chiu and Shih-huang-ti.





Shao's story is a perfect match to what historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien recounted later. Uncanny, isn't it?

No doubt. Though the parts about dragons and eternal life are a tad ... dubious.



Yet Shao's concluding chapter is perfectly plausible as well. He explains how he survived the purges that followed the disappearance of Shih-huang-ti.



Shao mentions the eventual arrest and then execution of Li Ssu by the second and final Ch'in emperor, two years after the death of the first, and only six years before the Han dynasty came to power.



So the oracle's curse came to pass, in the end. By refusing the throne to the one who'd allowed him to win the War of the Seven Kingdoms, Shih-huang-ti caused his line to lose the empire.



Exactly. Shao goes on to explain how he planned to relay his story to future generations. He stole from the palace's master craftsmen - I quote - 'statuettes of warriors, models that had served to create the soldiers of the army that would protect the emperor's tomb'.



The soldiers of the emperor's tomb?! What soldiers was he talking about?

I must confess that I'm rather mystified by this part. But listen to the end of Shao's tale ...



Today I have finished my account. I will hide both halves of my manuscript inside the statuettes, which I will place safely inside two caskets.



'With them I will also place the crossbow mechanism brought by Shou Kung and the gold necklace the emperor had presented him with. Thus, all the evidence as to the truth of my story will be available to future generations.'



'Finally, I will hide the caskets where I know they won't be found until long after my death ...'



'... amidst the countless imperial treasures hoarded in the palace cellars.'



See, Professor? Even the conclusion of the story is coherent with everything we know of History. So? Why not also the more ... ah ...

... fantastic parts? I don't know if my reason can accept such an idea ...



AT THAT MOMENT, SOME 600 MILES SOUTH, CAPTAIN BLAKE'S PLANE IS TANGLING WITH INCREASINGLY SEVERE WEATHER.



Good Lord! I can't see a thing! But we should be—

There! Lines of lights! That's Saigon airport!



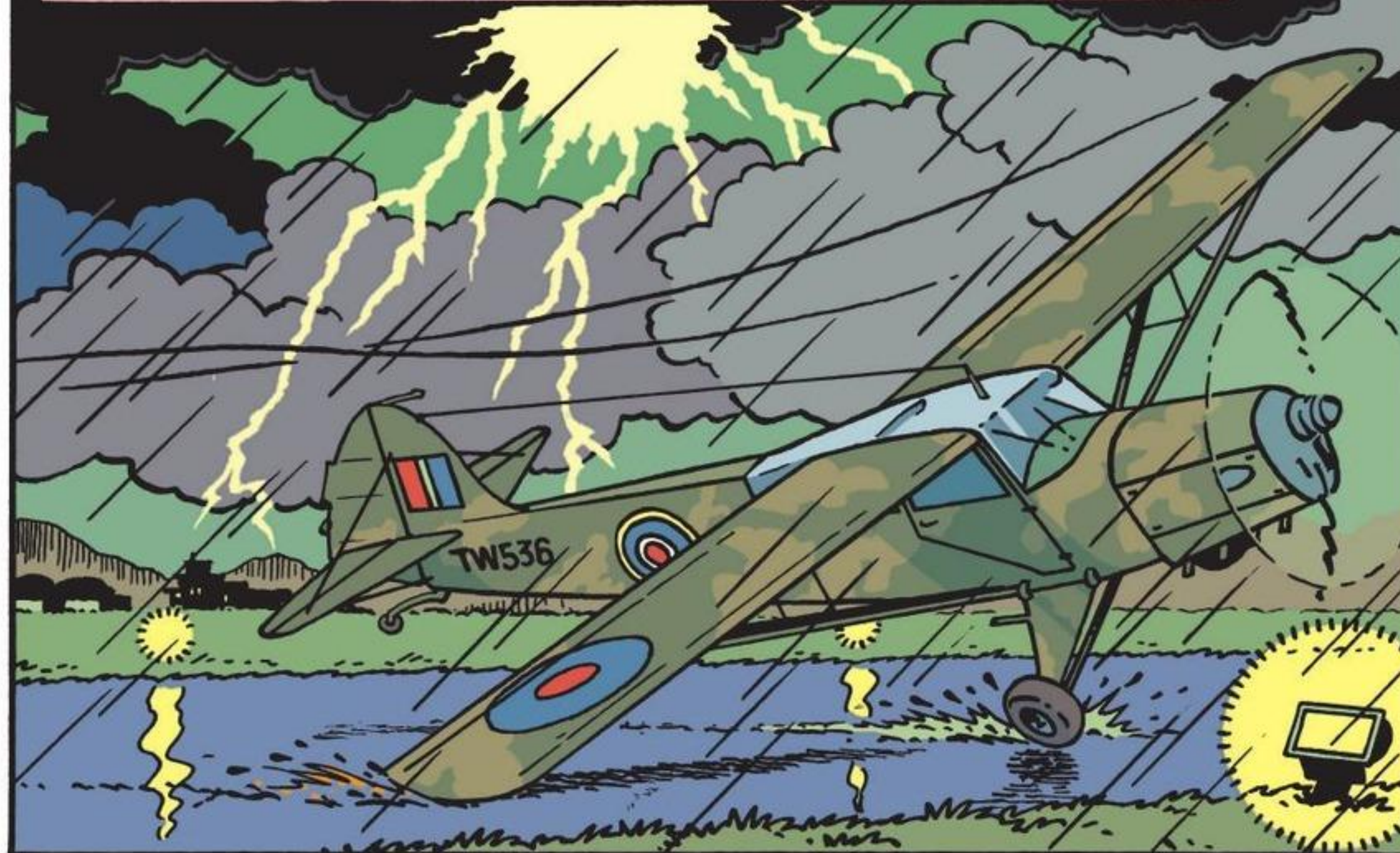
Mayday! Mayday! Captain Blake to Saigon tower! Requesting emergency landing clearance — we are flying on fumes ...



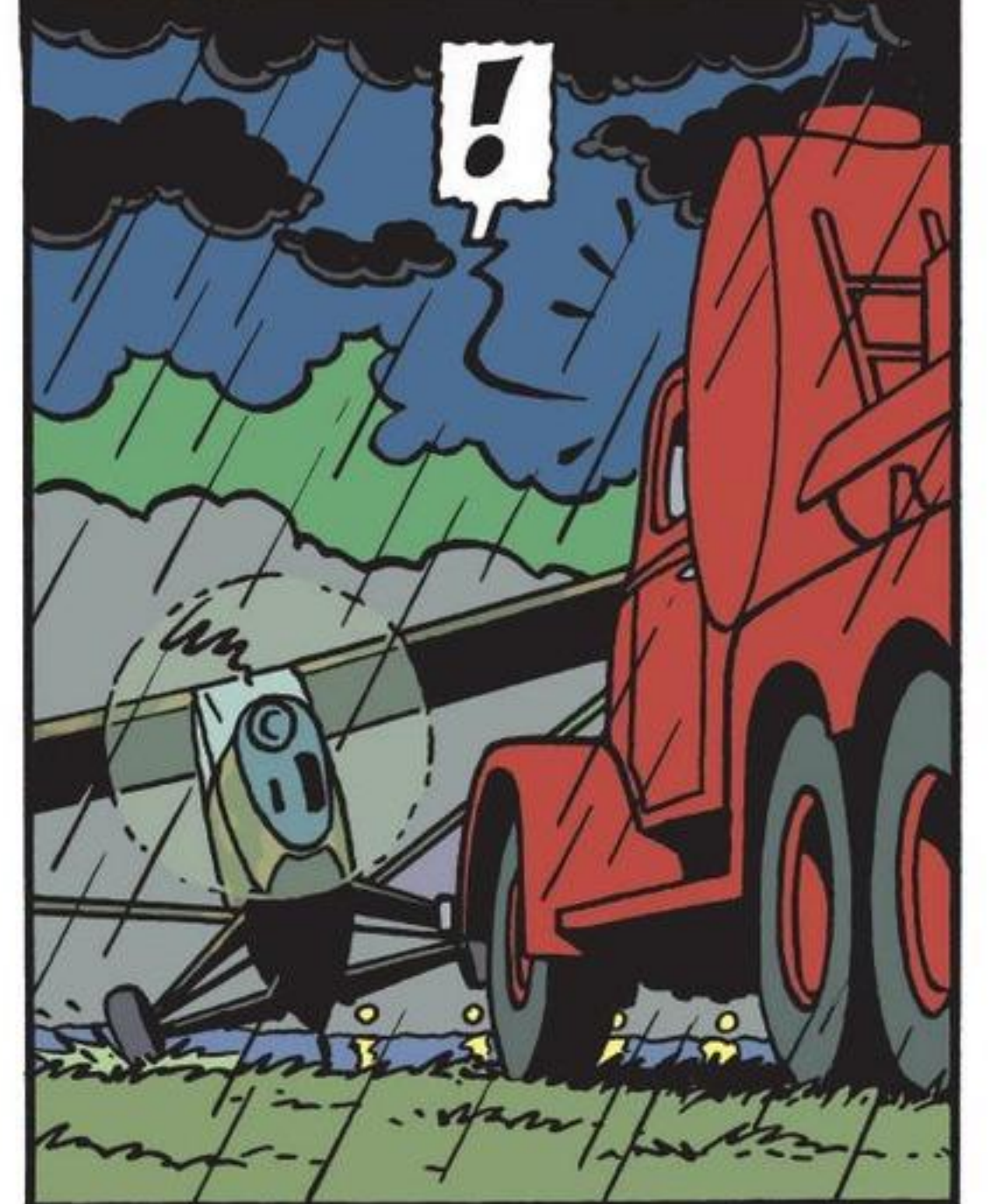
You're cleared to land, Captain! And you're the only one in our airspace with this weather ... Emergency vehicles are on alert. Good luck!



SUDDENLY, JUST AS THE PILOT IS ABOUT TO TOUCH HIS WHEELS TO THE GROUND, A BLAST OF LATERAL WIND SLAMS INTO THE LIGHT AIRCRAFT, THROWING IT SIDWAYS ...



THE CAPTAIN'S EXCELLENT REFLEXES KEEP THE PLANE UPRIGHT ...



... AT THE EXPENSE OF ITS TRAJECTORY.



... IS JUST ENOUGH TO PREVENT A DISASTER.



Oh, hello, gentlemen.

A FEW MINUTES LATER, IN THE OFFICE OF COLONEL BEAUSSART, HEAD OF SECURITY FOR THE AIRPORT.

... The weather won't improve for several hours. I can offer you a couple of cots in the fire station.

Thank you, Colonel. Please wake us if the sky clears before dawn.



IN THE END, THE VETERAN COMBAT PILOT'S COOL HEAD ...



EARLY THE FOLLOWING DAY, THE SMALL GROUP LED BY MR CHOU HAS LEFT ITS SHELTER TO TREK DEEPER INTO THE JUNGLE ...



Ahhh! I can't go on.

Let's move! We're still several hours away from the camp.

Can't you see this man is spent? Maybe we could—



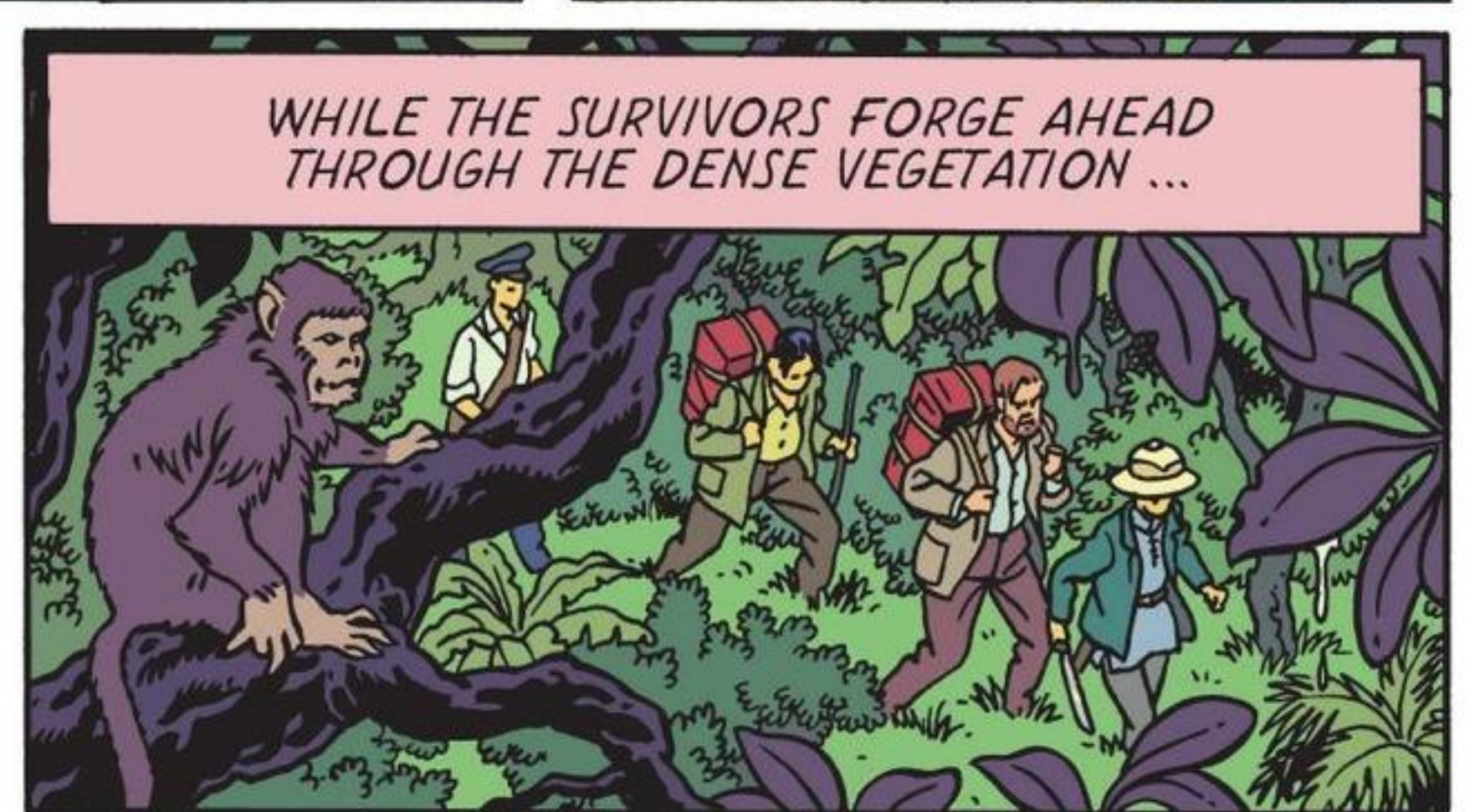
Maybe the general can easily find another translator for his old papers. If you don't get up immediately, Mr Tieh, I'll be forced to consider you of no use.



No! I ... I feel better!



WHILE THE SURVIVORS FORGE AHEAD THROUGH THE DENSE VEGETATION ...

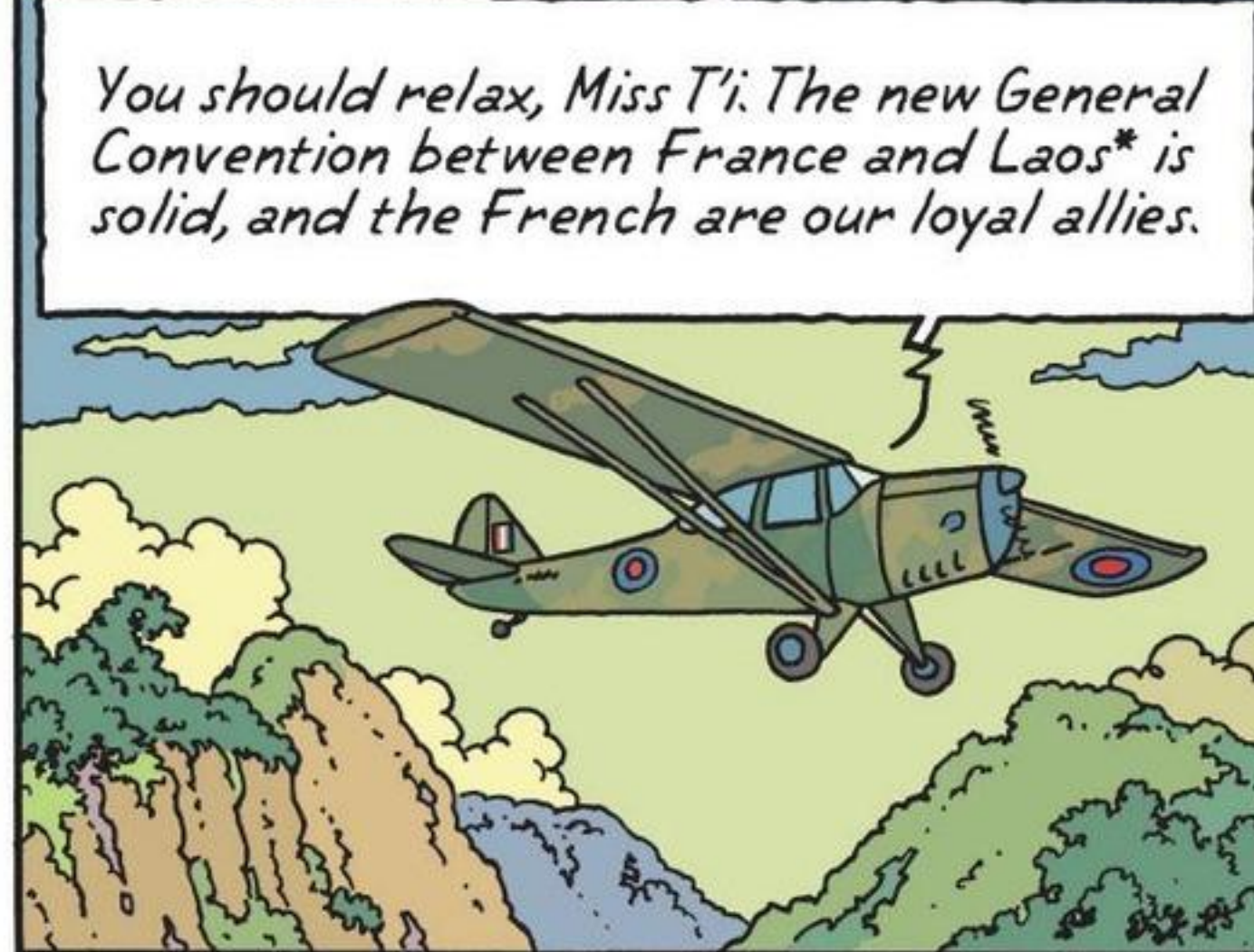


... CAPTAIN BLAKE AND T'I I-LAN, BLESSED WITH MORE CLEMENT WEATHER, TAKE OFF FROM SAIGON ...

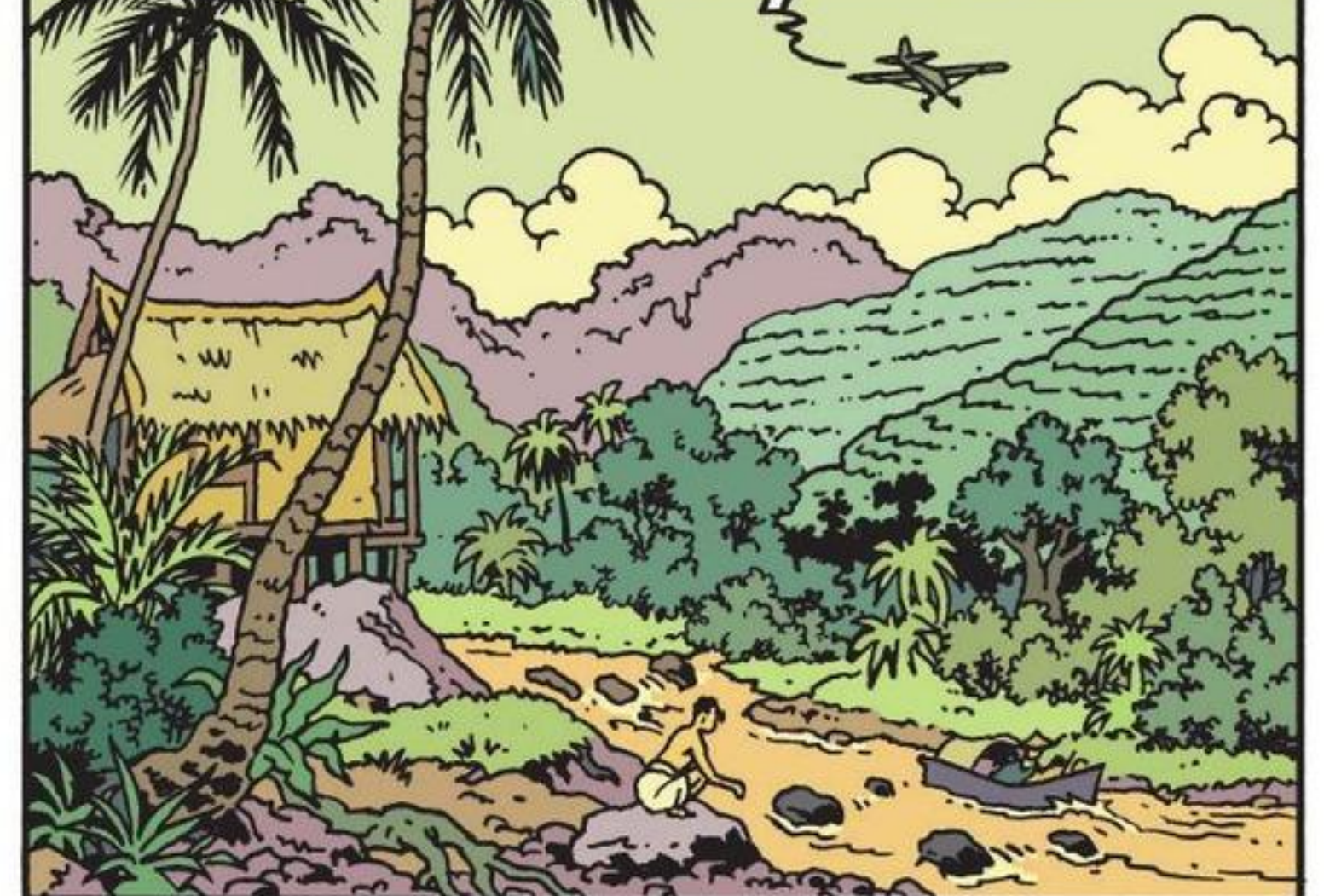


...TO HEAD DUE NORTH TOWARDS LAOS.

You should relax, Miss T'i. The new General Convention between France and Laos* is solid, and the French are our loyal allies.



Enjoy the scenery — all we have to worry about is the weather!

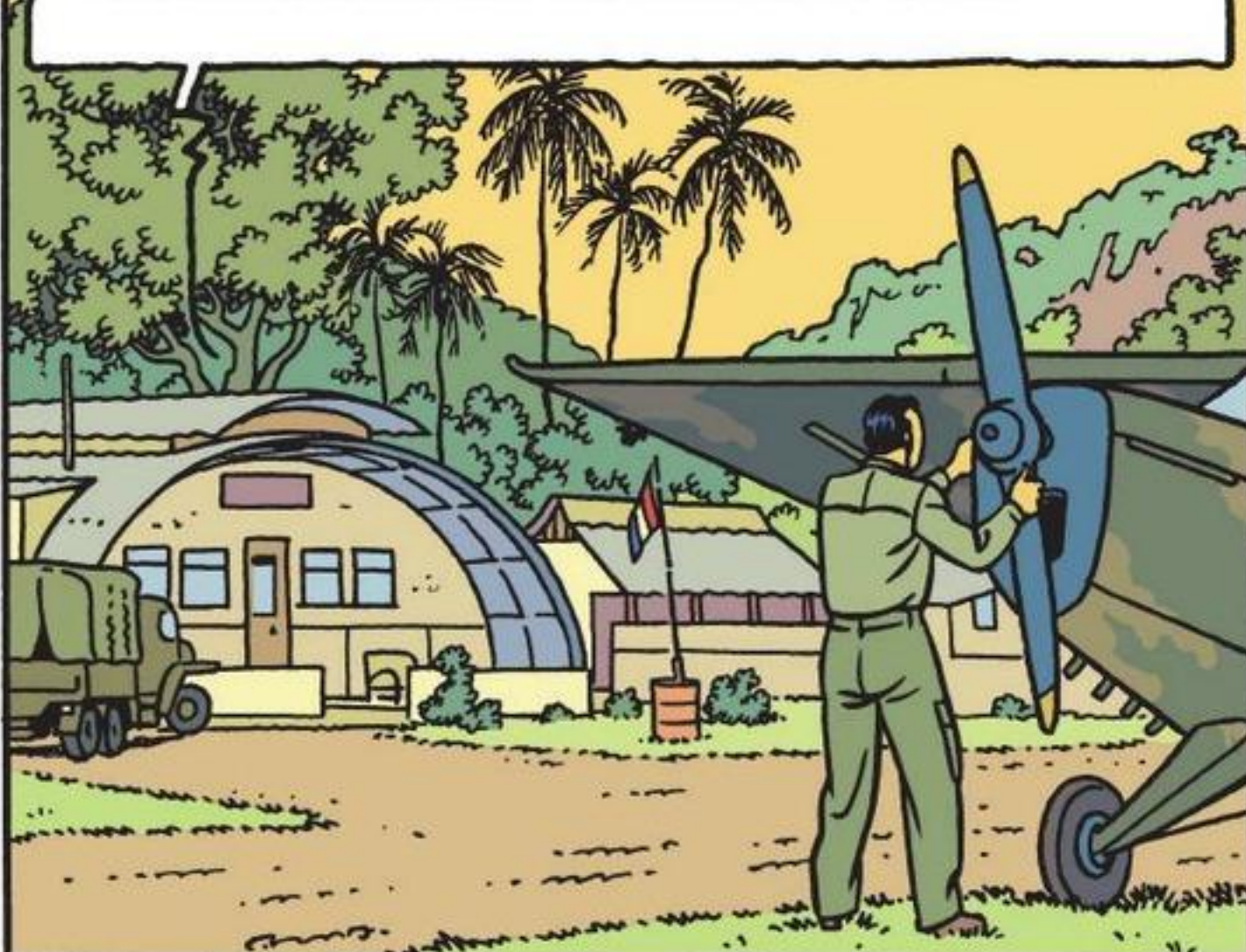


LESS THAN THREE HOURS LATER, NORTH OF LUANG PRABANG, NEAR THE BORDER WITH CHINA, THE FRENCH AIR FORCE BOISMENU AIRFIELD IS IN SIGHT.



NO SOONER HAVE THEY LANDED THAN THE CAPTAIN AND MISS T'I JOIN COMMANDANT MONTAGNE, THE BASE COMMANDER.

According to our intelligence, General Li Hsi's base should be in that area ...



We know he has P-51 fighters, which means an airstrip. The kidnappers probably took a small plane from Kunming to the camp we're looking for.

According to Father Odilon, the Red Wing was intercepted somewhere around there. The back end of Hsi-shuang-pan-na is the perfect spot for a hidden base.

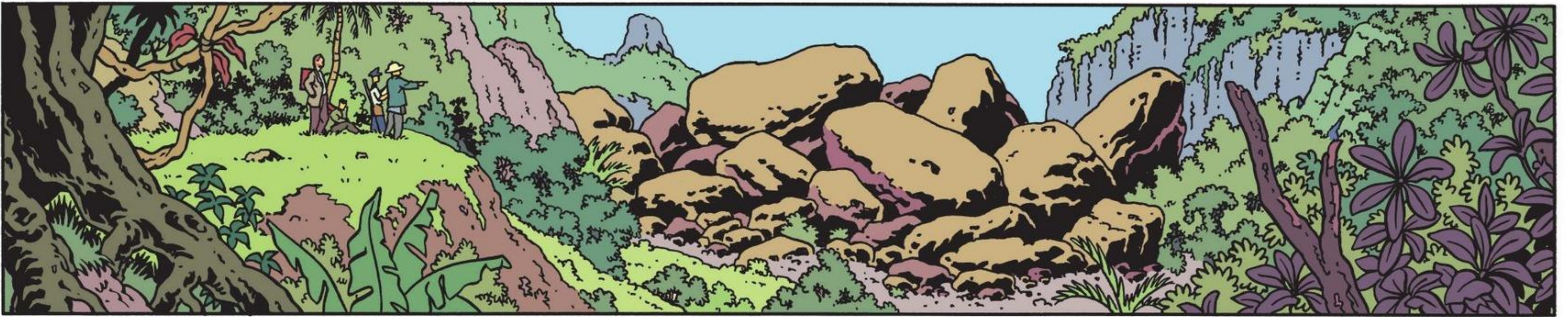


Very well. Let's rest for a few hours, and then we'll head in that direction ...

... after you let me 'prepare' you, Captain — don't forget ...



*SIGNED IN JULY 1949, THE CONVENTION REAFFIRMED LAOS' MEMBERSHIP IN THE FRENCH 'COMMONWEALTH' WHILE OPENING THE DOOR TO EVENTUAL INDEPENDENCE.



Perfect. According to the map, our destination was under 15 minutes of flight beyond that cliff. We should be able to reach HQ in about five hours on foot.



Five hours?! But ... Have you seen how tall that cliff is? I'll never be able—

Don't give them an opening to do something stupid. I'll help you.



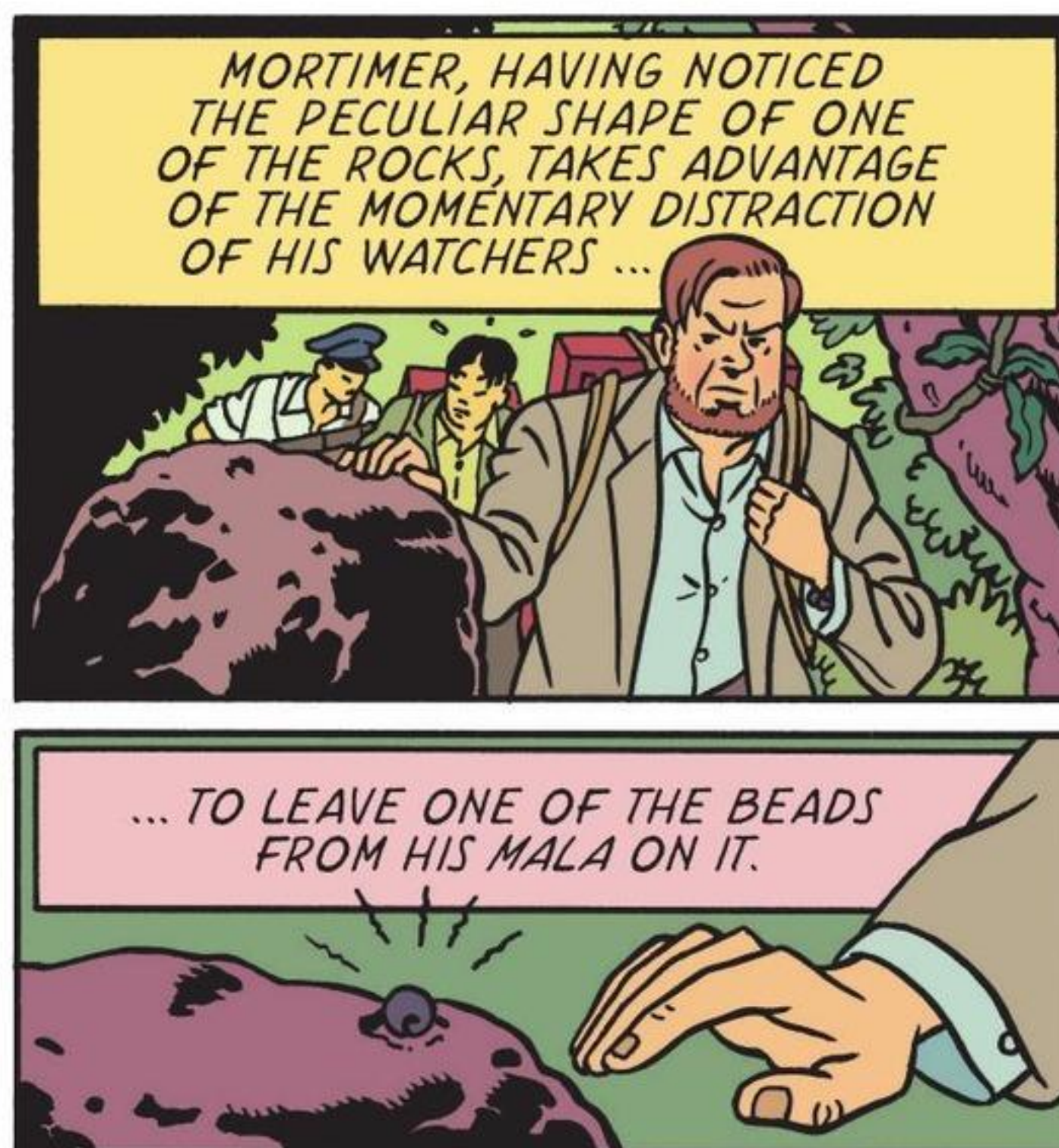
Ha! The boss found the passage. Move it!

A secret passage! See? Over there, next to that rock that looks like a—



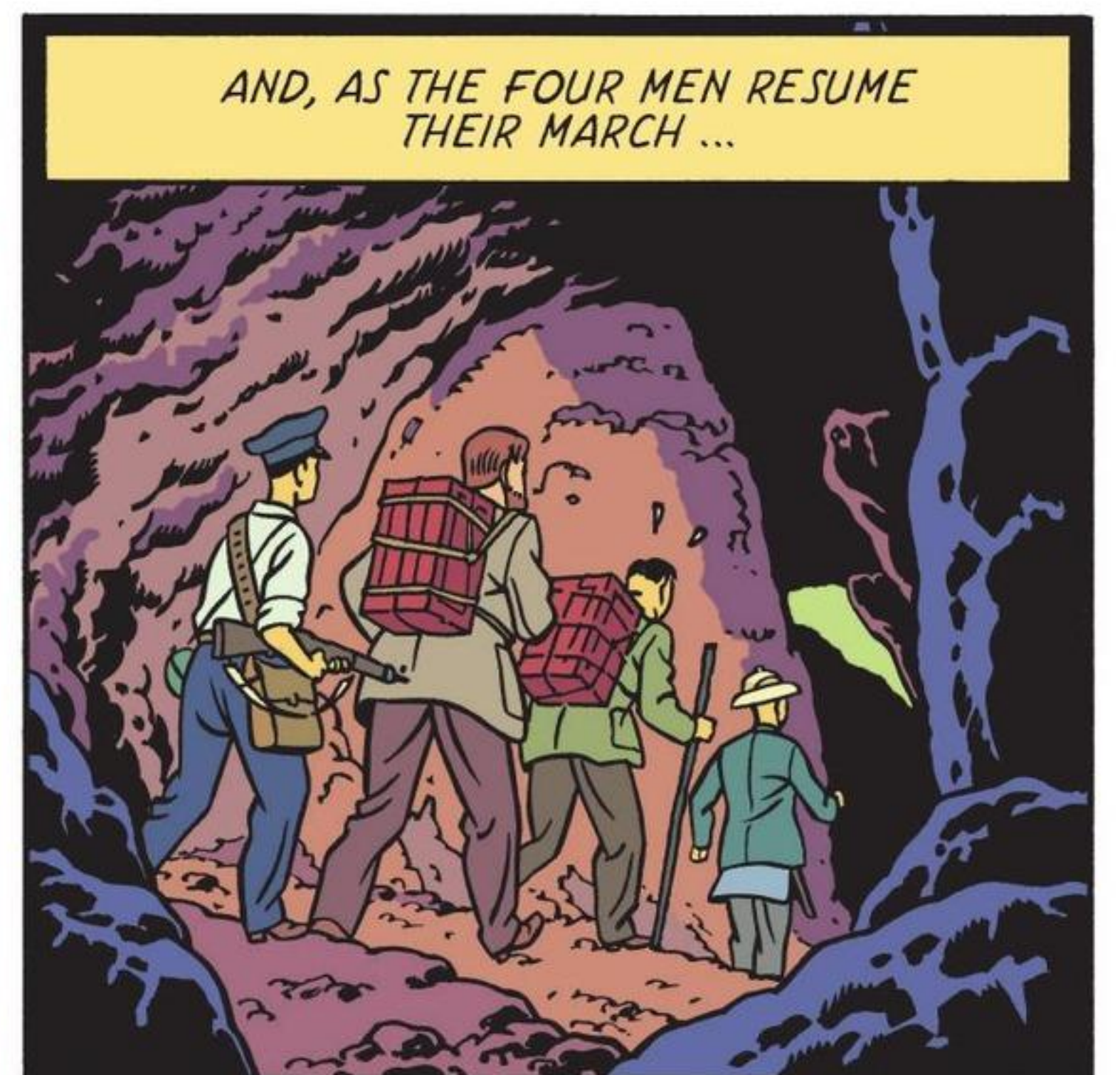
The Heavens have heard me! I won't have to climb that cliff ...

Ow!

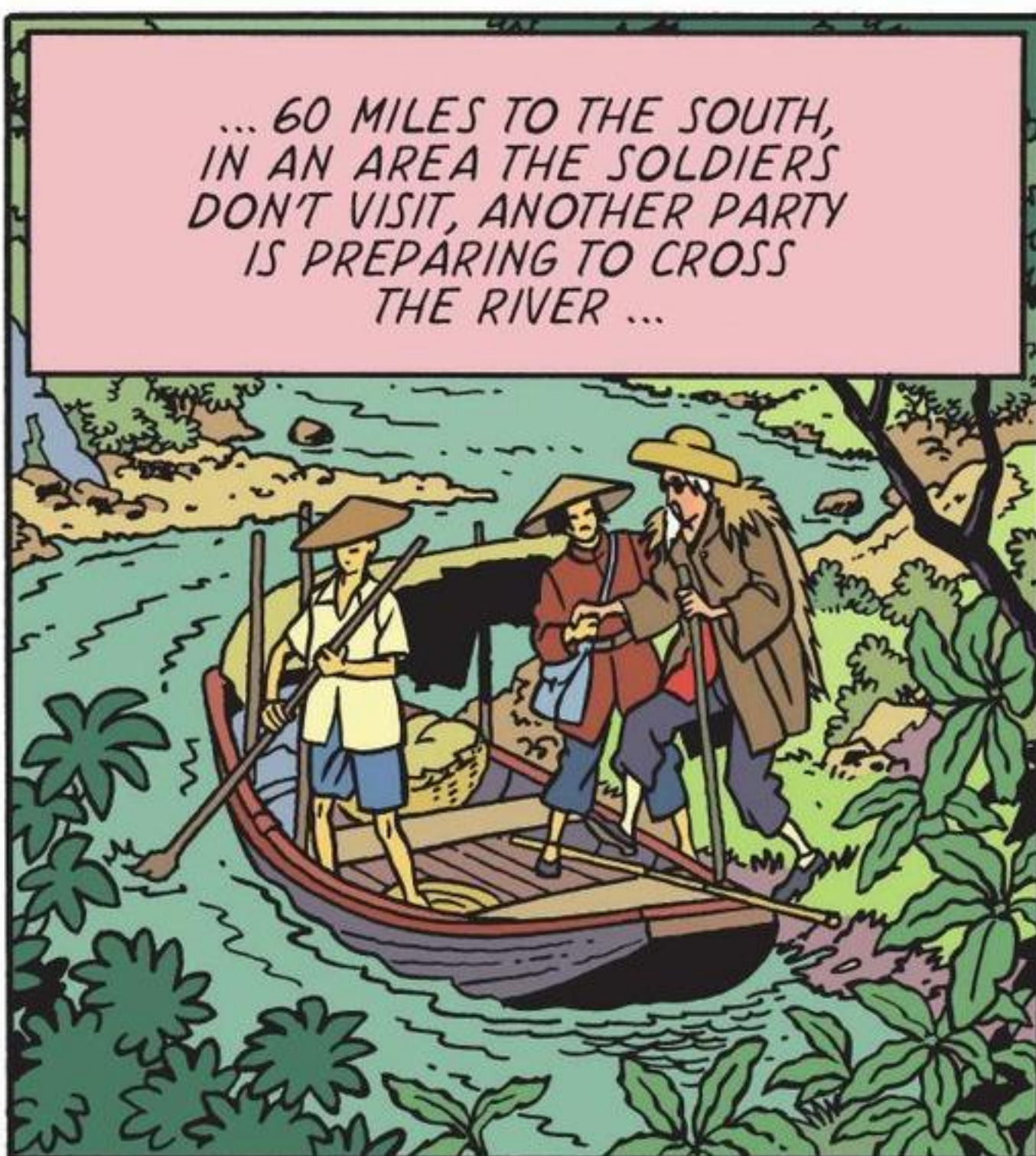


MORTIMER, HAVING NOTICED THE PECULIAR SHAPE OF ONE OF THE ROCKS, TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THE MOMENTARY DISTRACTION OF HIS WATCHERS ...

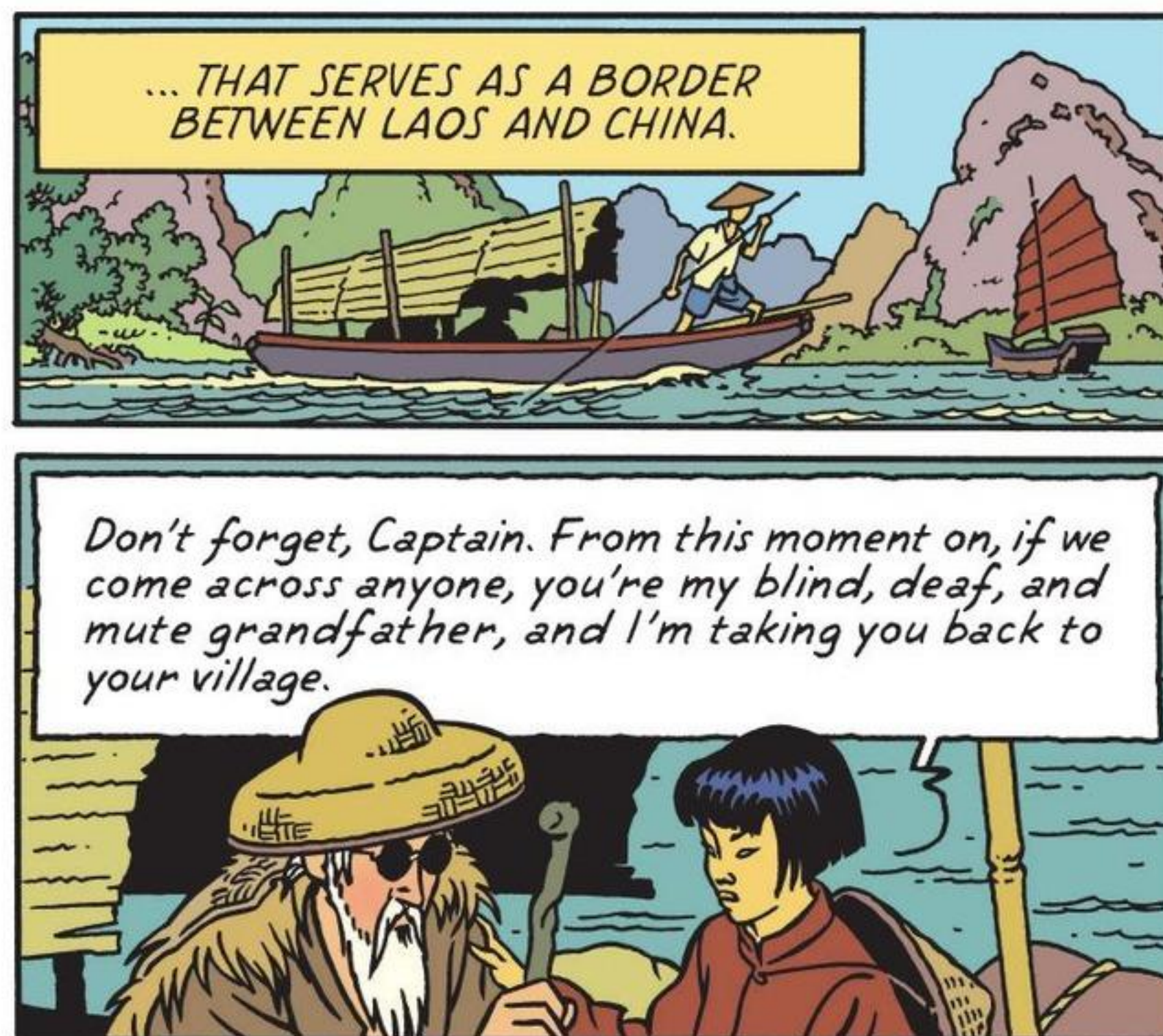
... TO LEAVE ONE OF THE BEADS FROM HIS MALA ON IT.



AND, AS THE FOUR MEN RESUME THEIR MARCH ...



... 60 MILES TO THE SOUTH, IN AN AREA THE SOLDIERS DON'T VISIT, ANOTHER PARTY IS PREPARING TO CROSS THE RIVER ...



... THAT SERVES AS A BORDER BETWEEN LAOS AND CHINA.

Don't forget, Captain. From this moment on, if we come across anyone, you're my blind, deaf, and mute grandfather, and I'm taking you back to your village.



A FEW HOURS LATER, THE GROUP LED BY MR CHOU FINALLY ARRIVES AT ITS DESTINATION.

Hold your fire! I'm bringing precious documents to General Li Hsi, as well as prisoners!

UPON ARRIVAL, MR CHOU REPORTS TO GENERAL LI HSI, AND THE PRISONERS ARE TAKEN TO THE WARLORD.

You have earned your fee, Mr Chou.

As for you, Tieh Han, I want a written translation of Shao's story that even the most uneducated peasant could understand.

As you command, General. But ... May I ask why I'm being treated as a prisoner even though I followed your orders loyally?

A mere precaution ... necessary as long as you haven't translated the text that will prove to the world that I am, indeed, the rightful heir to Shih-huang-ti!

The idea is to keep you alive while you're useful. We should discuss your chances of survival after that.

Silence, you miserable English dog!

So, what about me? May I finally know why I was kidnapped? I've got better things to do than tour your ramshackle camp.

You're the very stereotype of that British arrogance I will soon flush out of all Asia! In the meantime, you will make yourself useful - believe me!

We've recovered a damaged Yellow Empire Red Wing. You will repair it for my pilots to fly.

Chinese humour, I imagine? I'd rather die than—

If you have no further need of me, general, I will take my leave.

All right. You can leave with our next plane to Kunming. In the meantime, you are our guest, of course.

Don't waste your breath on me. I already know how to get you to cooperate. Captain Piang, the prisoners are yours. Get them out of my sight, and only return once they have both fulfilled the tasks I demand of them!

In what sort of disgraceful conditions are you forcing those poor people to live?!

You're about to judge for yourself, Professor. As a matter of fact ...

... a friend of yours is waiting for you. Why don't you ask him what he thinks of our hospitality? Ha! Ha! Ha!

?



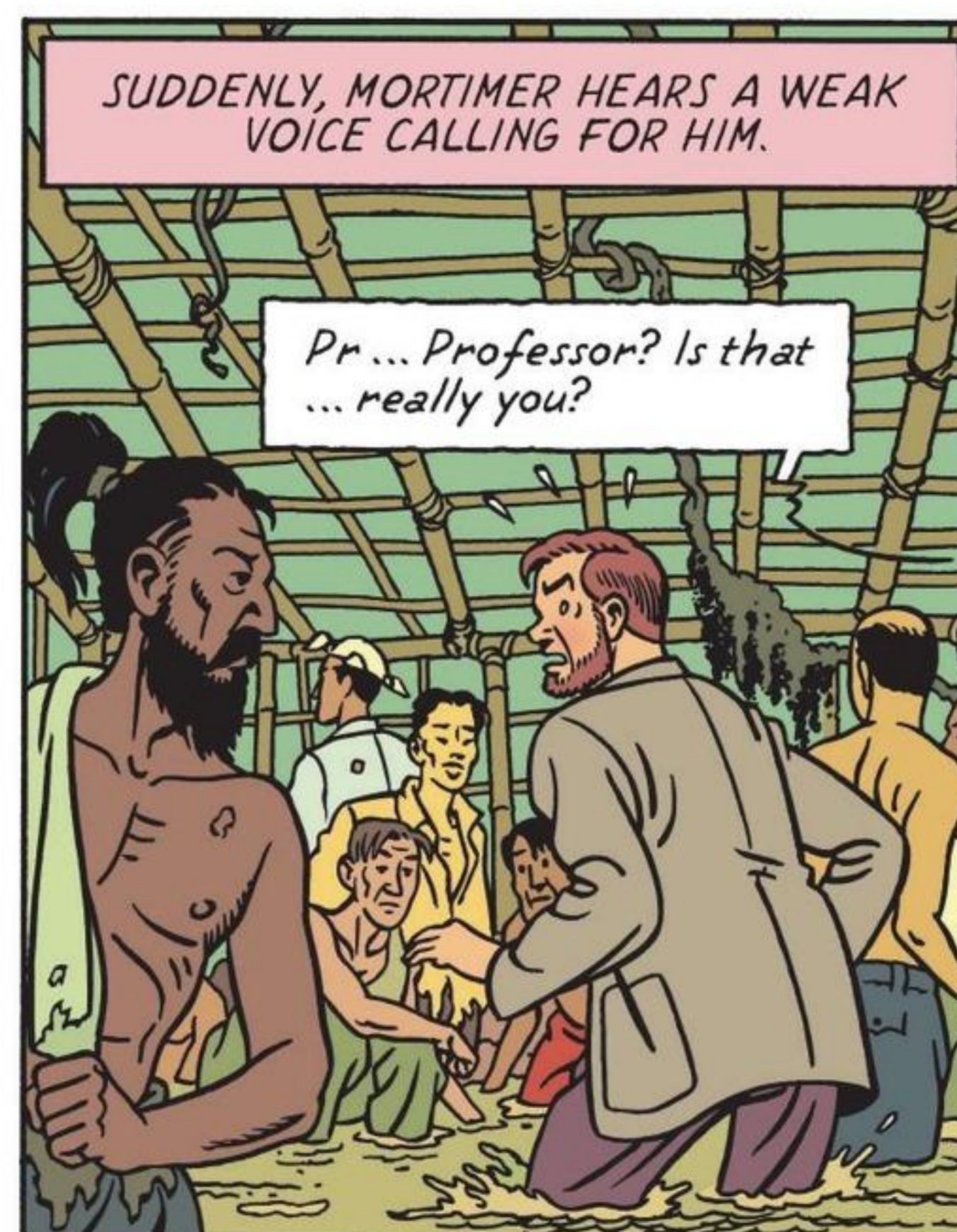
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!



Happy reunion, Professor!
Enjoy the time we're giving
you to think! Ha! Ha! Ha!



Good heavens! This is wretched! And who is it I'm
supposed to know in here? ...



SUDDENLY, MORTIMER HEARS A WEAK
VOICE CALLING FOR HIM.

Pr ... Professor? Is that
... really you?



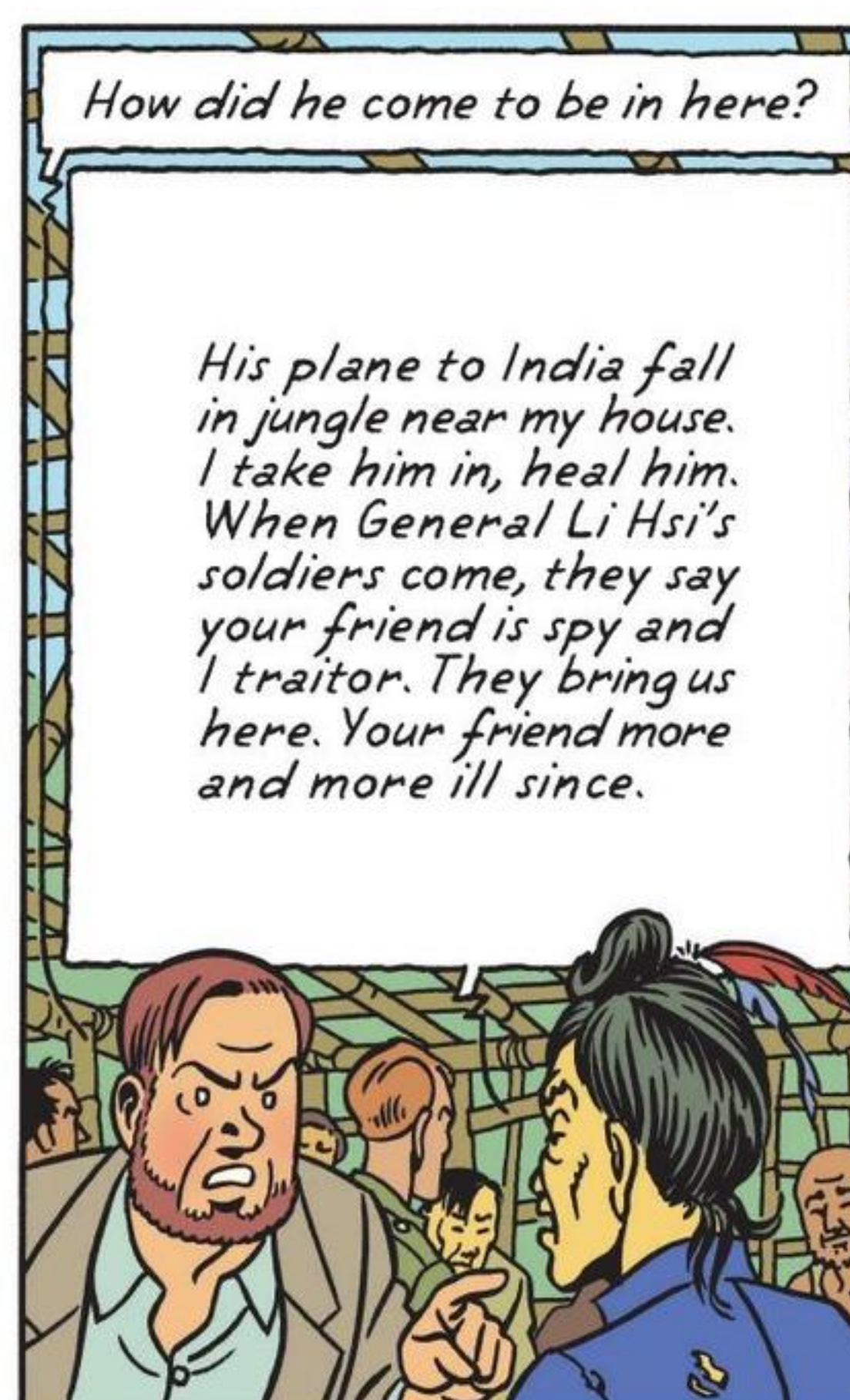
Nasir!? By Saint Andrew!
What have those thugs
done to you?



NO SOONER HAS MORTIMER
KNELT BY HIS OLD COMRADE-
IN-ARMS' SIDE THAN NASIR
PASSES OUT.

Oh, no! Don't tell me he—

Your friend alive, Red Hair,
but he have high fever. He
need medicine and fresh
food very soon, or he die.

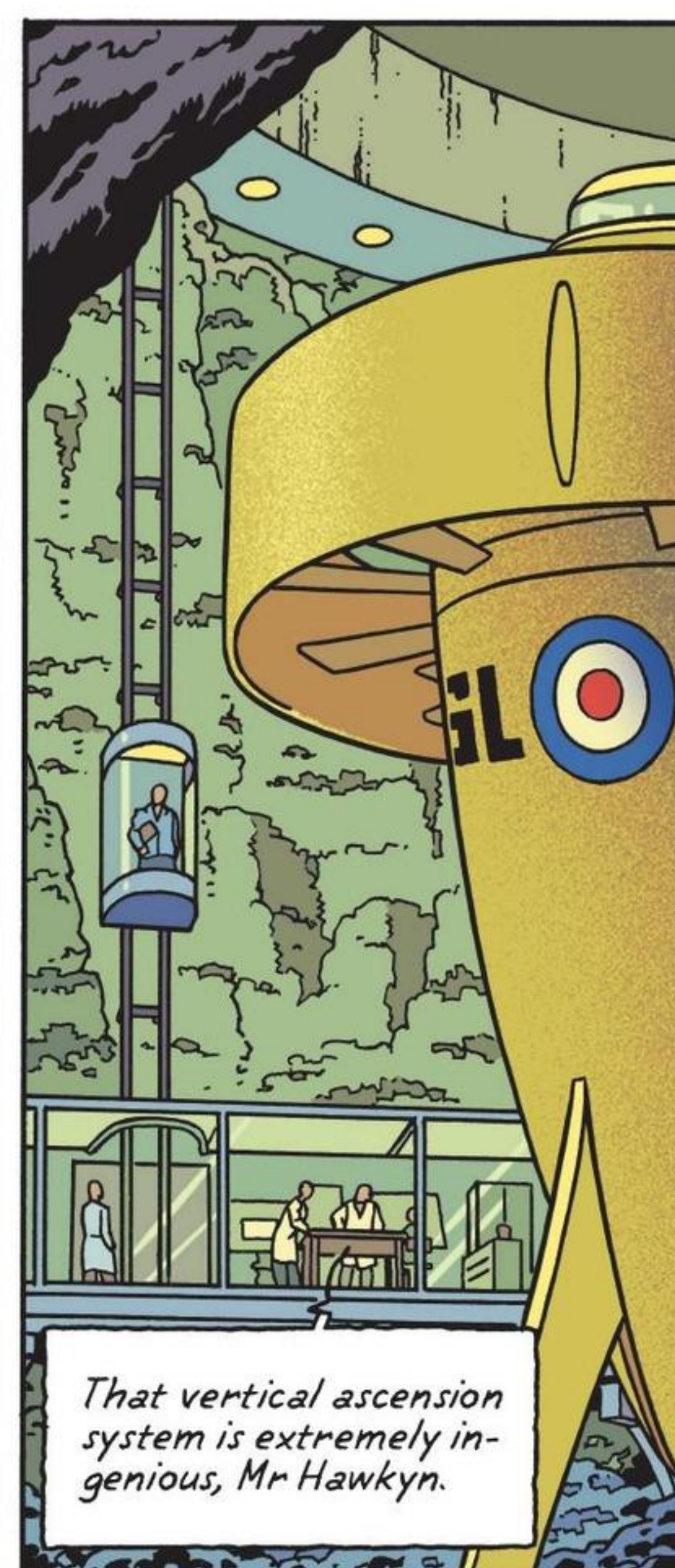


How did he come to be in here?

His plane to India fall
in jungle near my house.
I take him in, heal him.
When General Li Hsi's
soldiers come, they say
your friend is spy and
I traitor. They bring us
here. Your friend more
and more ill since.



MEANWHILE IN HONG KONG,
DEEP IN THE BOWELS OF THE
MOUNT DAVIS SECRET BASE ...



That vertical ascension
system is extremely in-
genious, Mr Hawkyn.



Isn't it, now? I have no doubt that that
technology, which we owe to Professor
Mortimer, will give us a sizable edge
over our enemies.



Speaking of which — it's been a while
since I've had the pleasure of seeing
either Professor Mortimer or Captain
Blake ...

They're off on a mission. For their
safety, as well as ours, I wasn't told
any more. Fear not, though. They'll
soon be back among us.



HUNDREDS OF MILES FROM HONG KONG ...

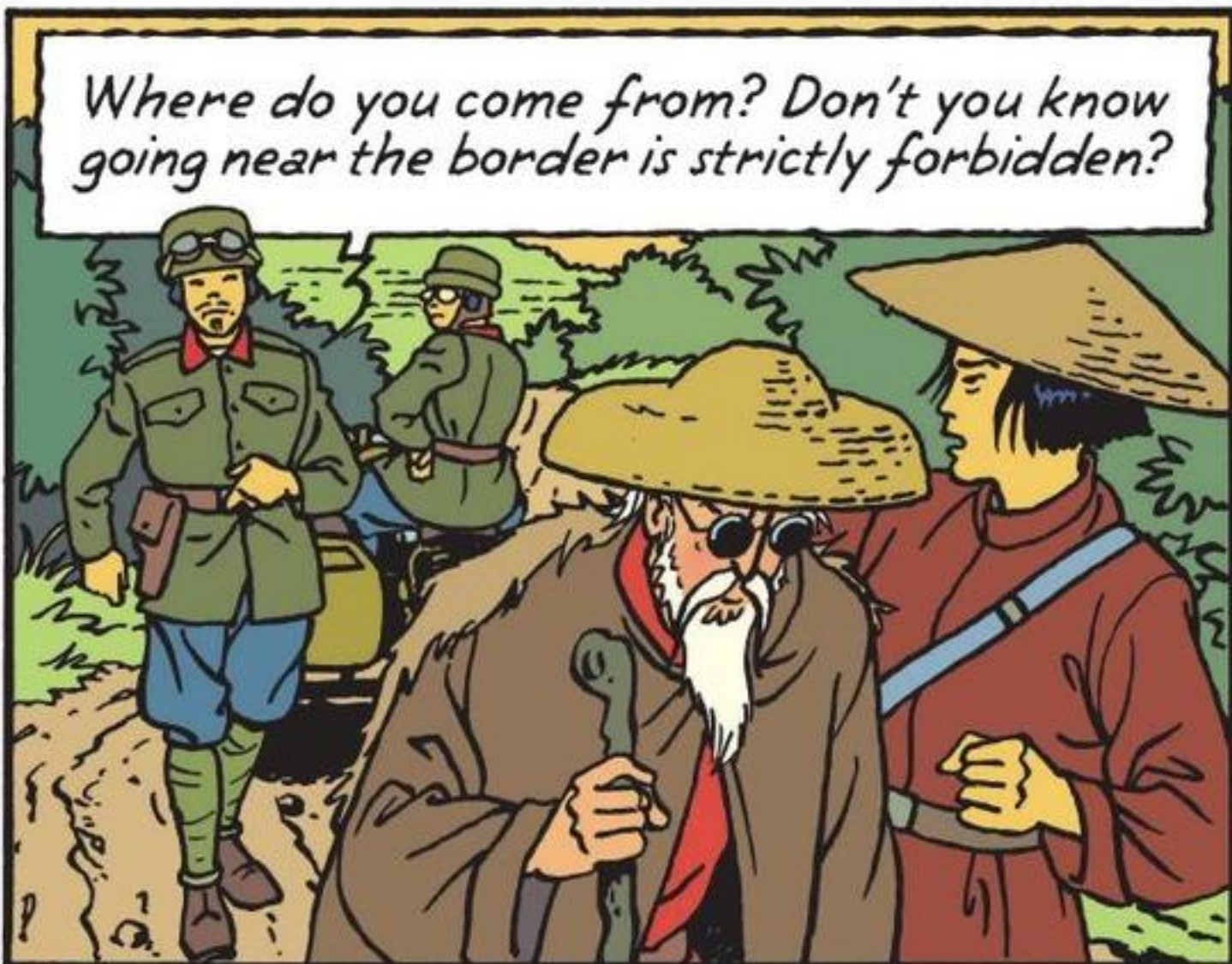
Careful, Captain! We're about to meet our
first patrol. Be ready to play your part
and trust me.



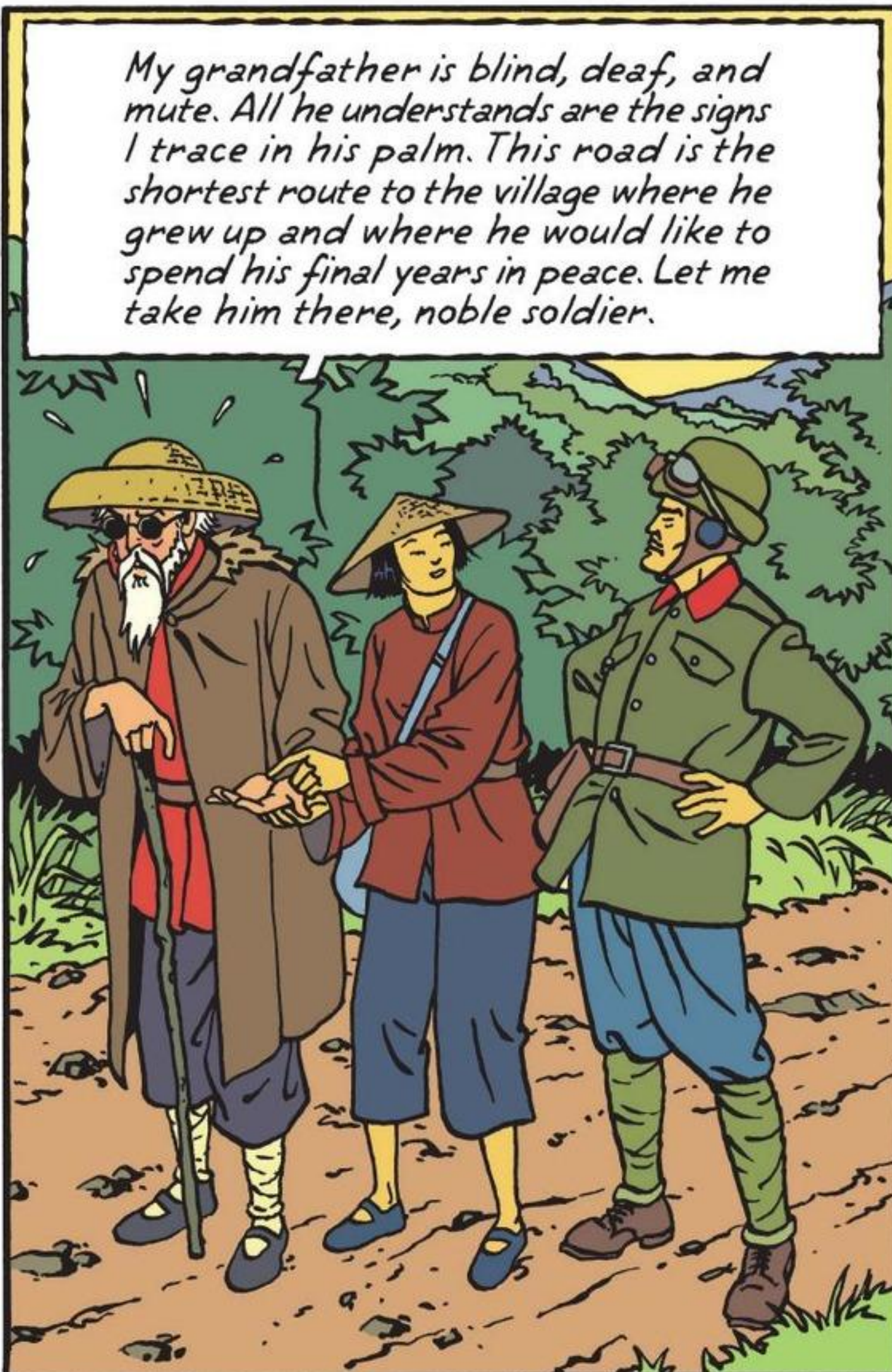
AS THEY HEAR THE MOTORBIKE BRAKE TO A HALT BEHIND THEM, BLAKE AND T'I I-LAN'S PROFESSIONAL INTELLIGENCE OPERATIVE INSTINCTS KICK IN.



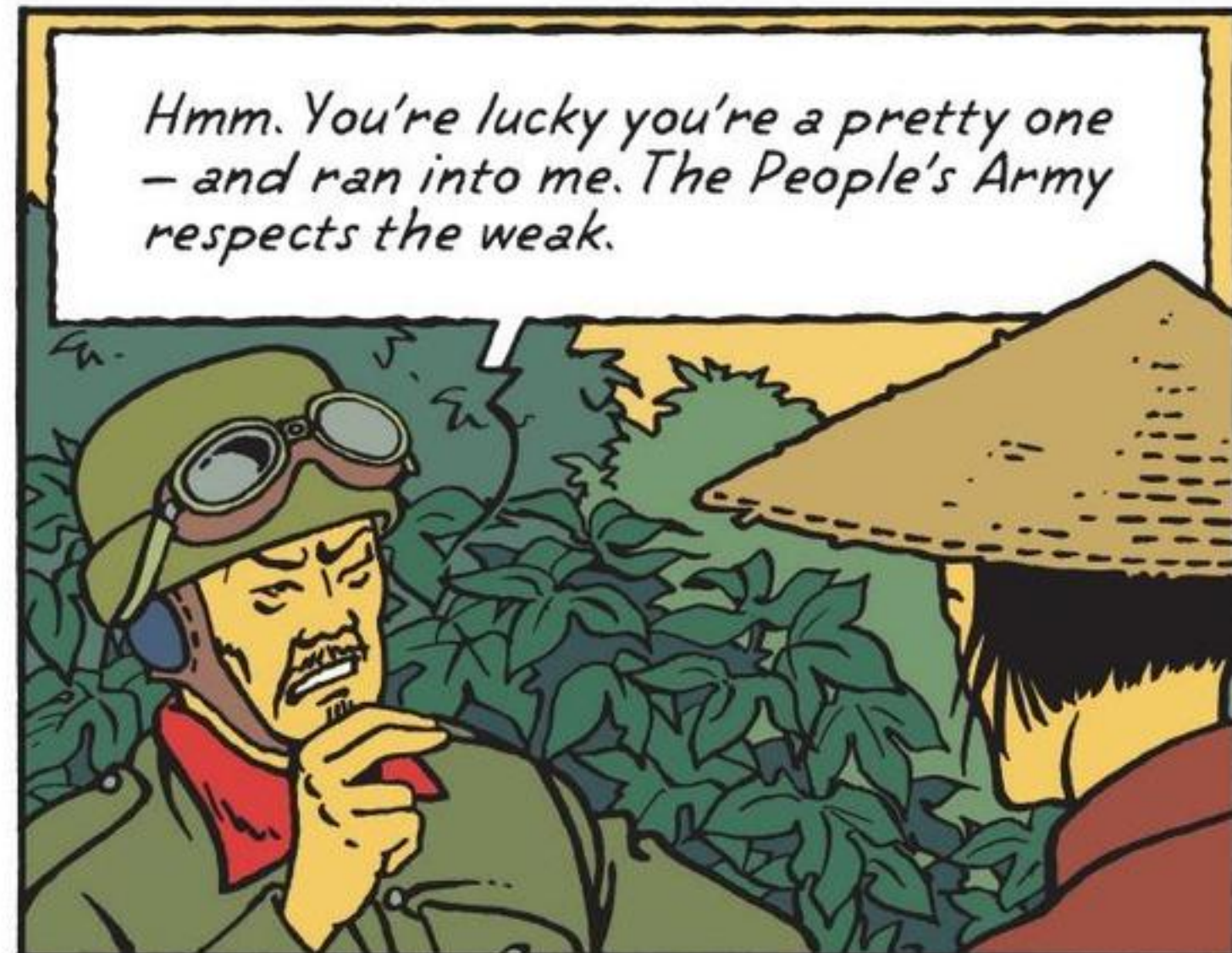
Hey, you two! Hold it!



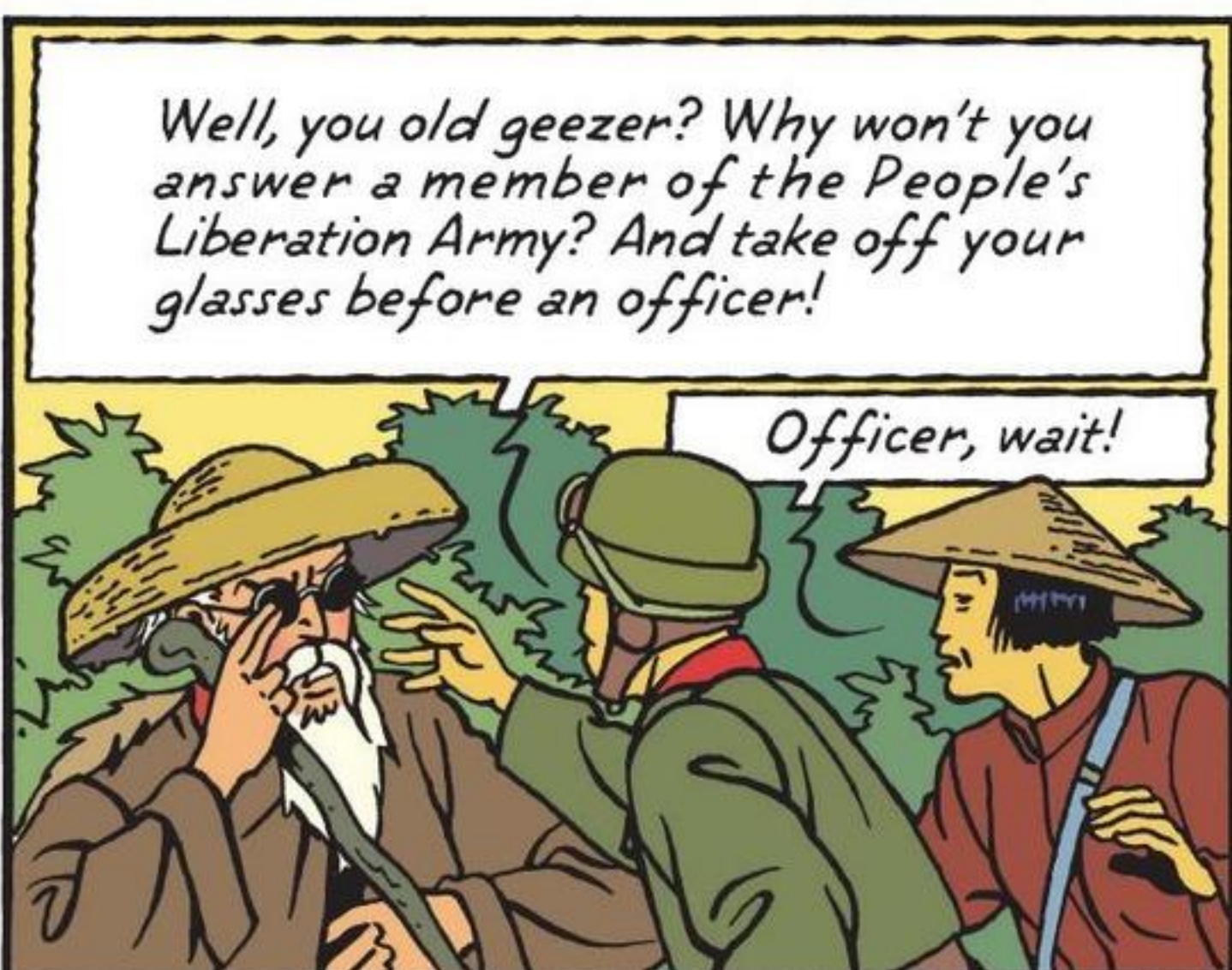
Where do you come from? Don't you know going near the border is strictly forbidden?



My grandfather is blind, deaf, and mute. All he understands are the signs I trace in his palm. This road is the shortest route to the village where he grew up and where he would like to spend his final years in peace. Let me take him there, noble soldier.



Hmm. You're lucky you're a pretty one – and ran into me. The People's Army respects the weak.

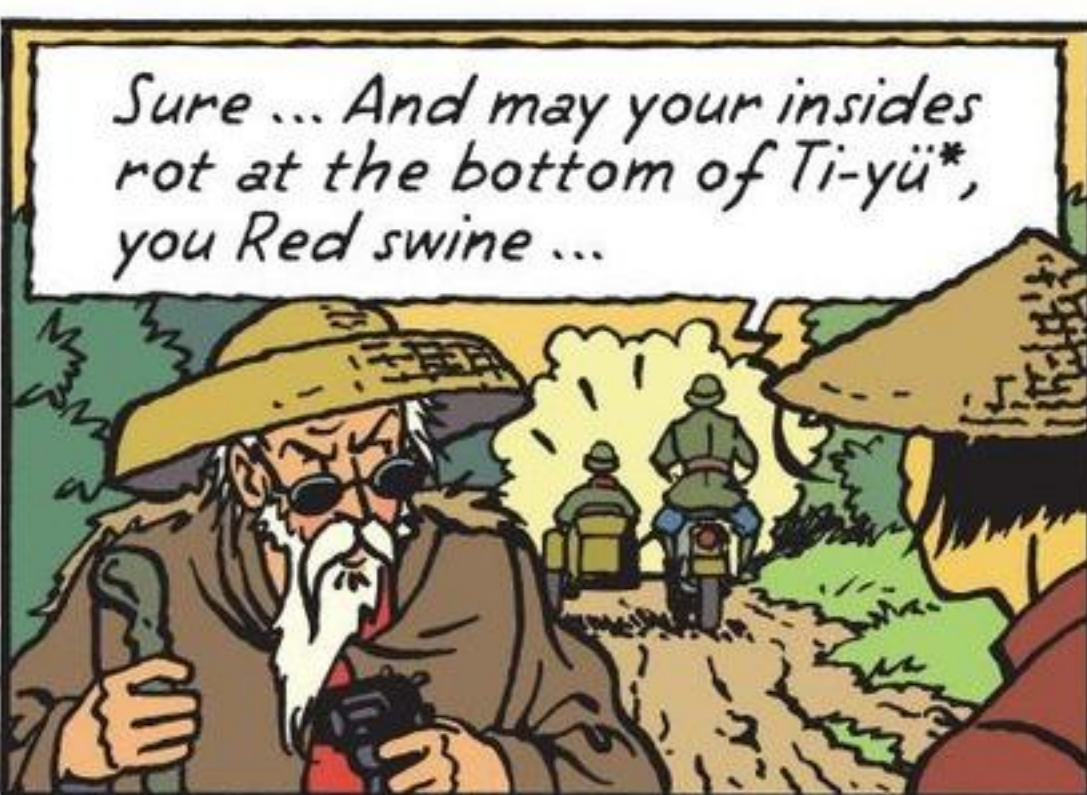


Well, you old geezer? Why won't you answer a member of the People's Liberation Army? And take off your glasses before an officer!

Officer, wait!



Go, and don't let me see you around here again!



Sure ... And may your insides rot at the bottom of Ti-yü*, you Red swine ...



Phewww ... That was close ...

Not that I wasn't itching to shoot him, but the mission comes first. Once we leave the vicinity of the border, things should go more smoothly.



AT LI HSI'S HEADQUARTERS, NASIR'S CONDITION SEEMS TO BE GETTING WORSE ...

Plants ease your friend pain but can't heal him. Fever too strong. He die in three or four days.

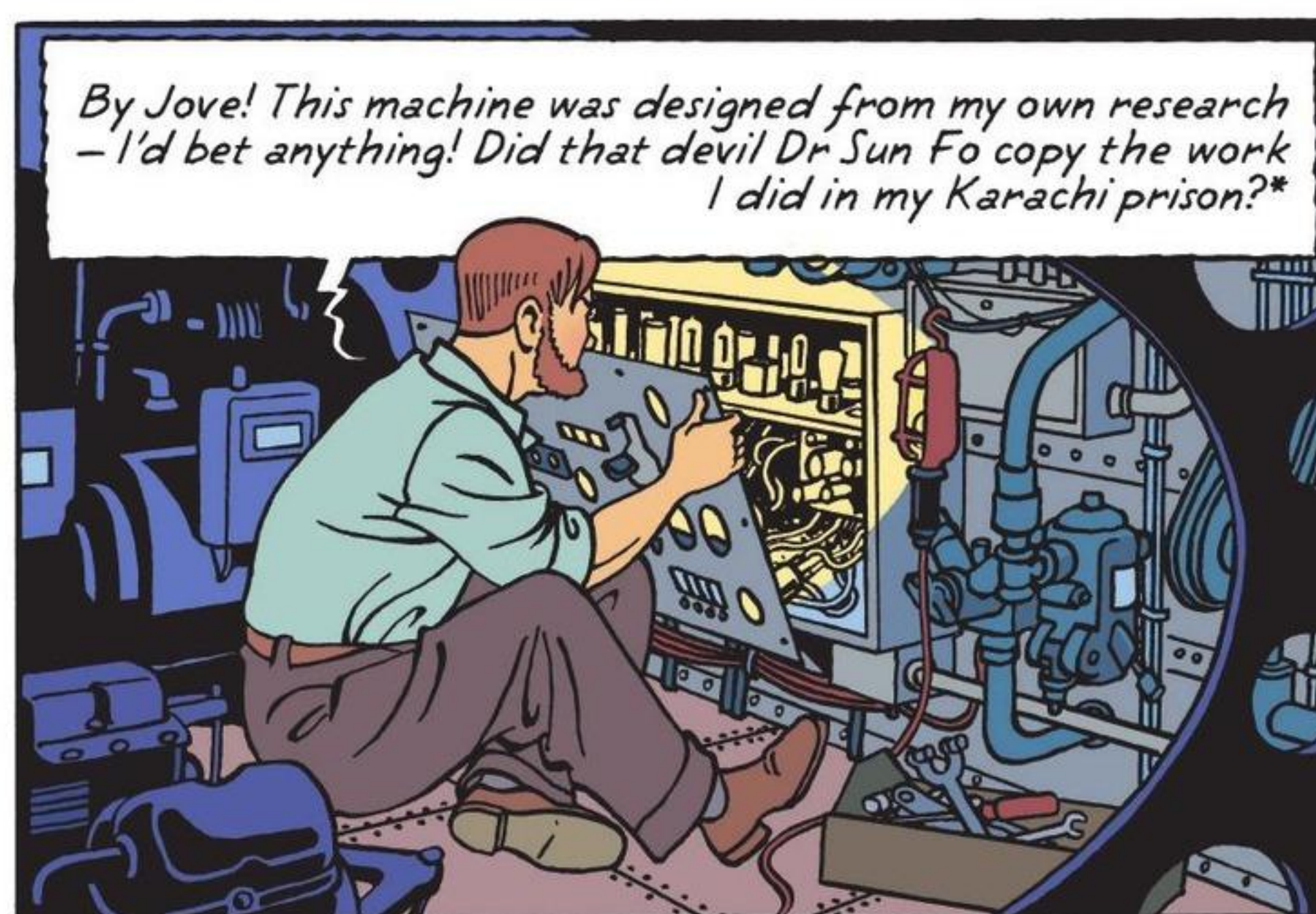
No!



I will not let him die.



Hey! Hey! Guard! Call your captain. I'll cooperate!



*SEE THE SECRET OF THE SWORDFISH.

FACED WITH THIS CRUEL DILEMMA, MORTIMER FEELS TORN. WHILE HE SIMPLY MUST SAVE NASIR'S LIFE, HE ALSO HAS TO FIND A WAY THAT WON'T ENDANGER THE BRITISH COLONY. HE MUST PLAY FOR TIME.

I've taken all the notes I should require, Captain. Now I need some quiet to think about how to approach the repairs.

In the meantime, have the machine guns reloaded. I must check that they work.

You can start thinking in there. I'm sure being near your poor, sick companion will do wonders for your concentration ...

SPLASH

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

I bought it in Hong Kong, from a young lady who claimed it would bring me happiness and luck. I wonder if I shouldn't go and ask her for a refund ...

Show!

Beads of very rare wood. The wei who sell mala see danger ... I see you are good man, stranger. You can save friend. I see ... I see ...

Thank you, but I'm afraid no amount of mala beads and good wishes can—

Ungh! A pox on that sadistic thug!

Your mala! Where you find it?

MORTIMER'S VOICE TRAILS OFF AS THE OLD WOMAN GOES INTO A DISTURBING TRANCE ...

Aaahmmmm ...

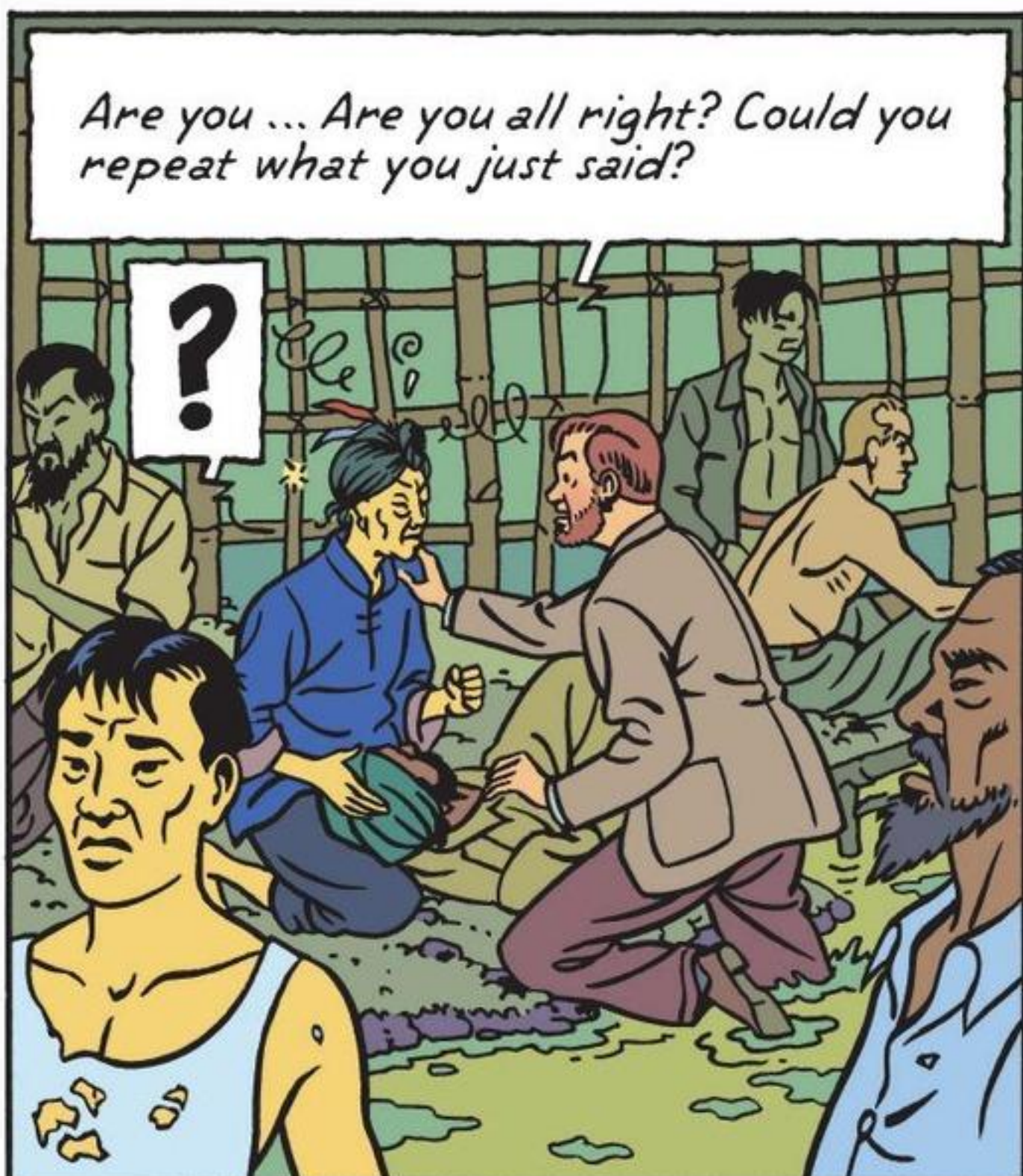
... BEFORE SHE BEGINS TO SPEAK IN A VOICE THAT SOUNDS LIKE SOMEONE ELSE'S.

Go and travel up the Mekong to its Thousandth Arm. Where the two join is a hut surrounded by pink and blue stupas and rare orchids. You will know it. Travel up that arm ... to its source!

By Jove! What she's telling me ... is precisely Shao's description of the path to the Valley of the Immortals!

There, before the cave of the Womb of Heaven, you will meet the Queen of Dragons ... If you avoid drawing the ire of her many husbands, and if you do not seek anything for yourself, then perhaps she will give you a Pearl of Eternal Life ...

?



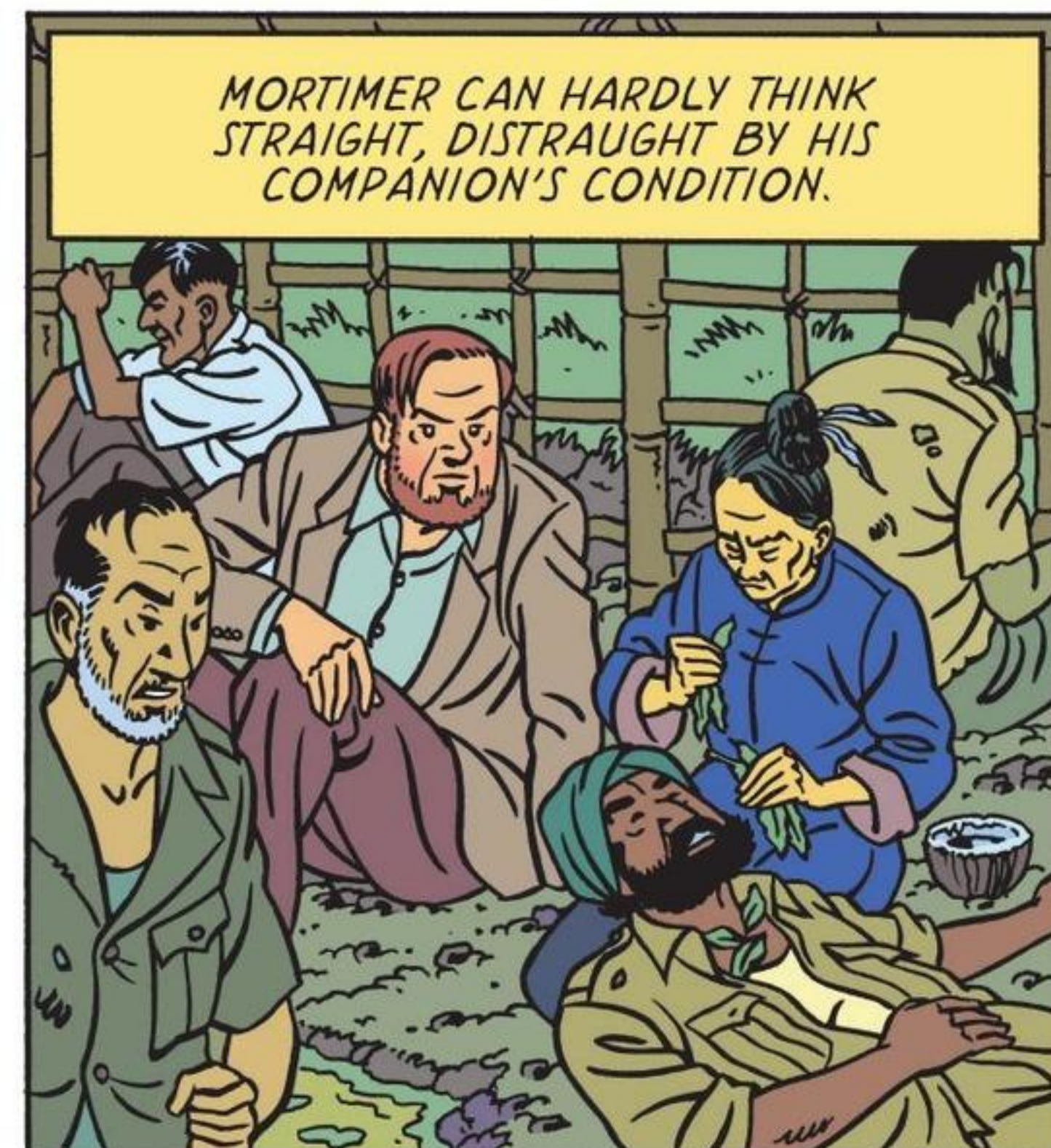
Are you ... Are you all right? Could you repeat what you just said?



Repeat what, stranger? I not say anything ...

What? You did! You told me of the path to follow to ... find a Queen of Dragons who could save my friend.

Oh? You know legend of Valley of the Immortals? Sorry, but legends not save men ... Now I must change plants that fight fever in your friend.



MORTIMER CAN HARDLY THINK STRAIGHT, DISTRAUGHT BY HIS COMPANION'S CONDITION.



HE EVENTUALLY NODS OFF, WITH THE THIN HOPE THAT WITH SLEEP WILL COME INSPIRATION.

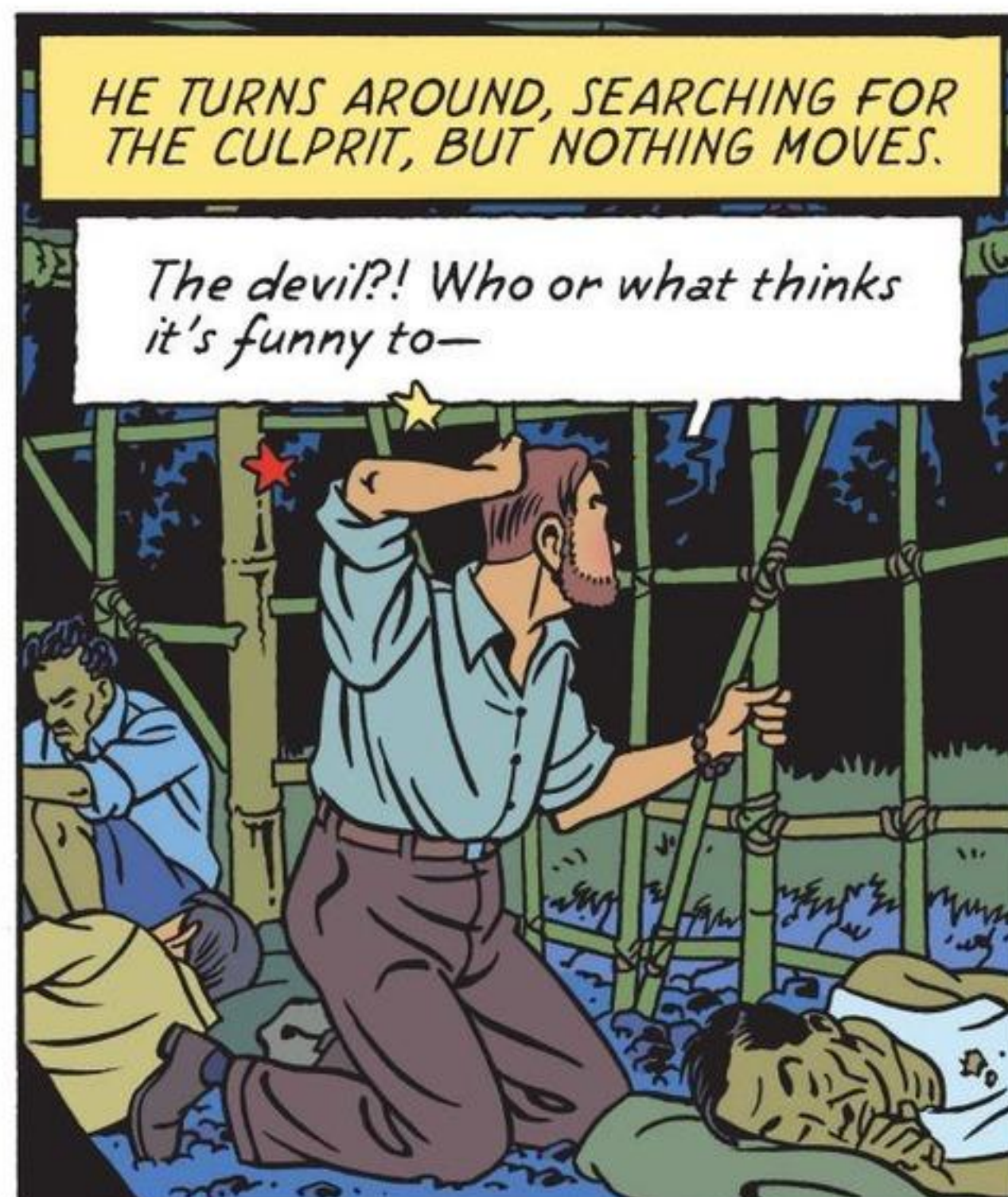


BUT IT IS SOMETHING ELSE THAT COMES ...



ONLY THE CRIES OF NOCTURNAL JUNGLE CREATURES DISTURB THE NIGHT WHEN A STONE, THROWN FROM OUTSIDE THE CAGE, RUDELY AWAKENS THE PROFESSOR.

Ouch!



HE TURNS AROUND, SEARCHING FOR THE CULPRIT, BUT NOTHING MOVES.

The devil?! Who or what thinks it's funny to—

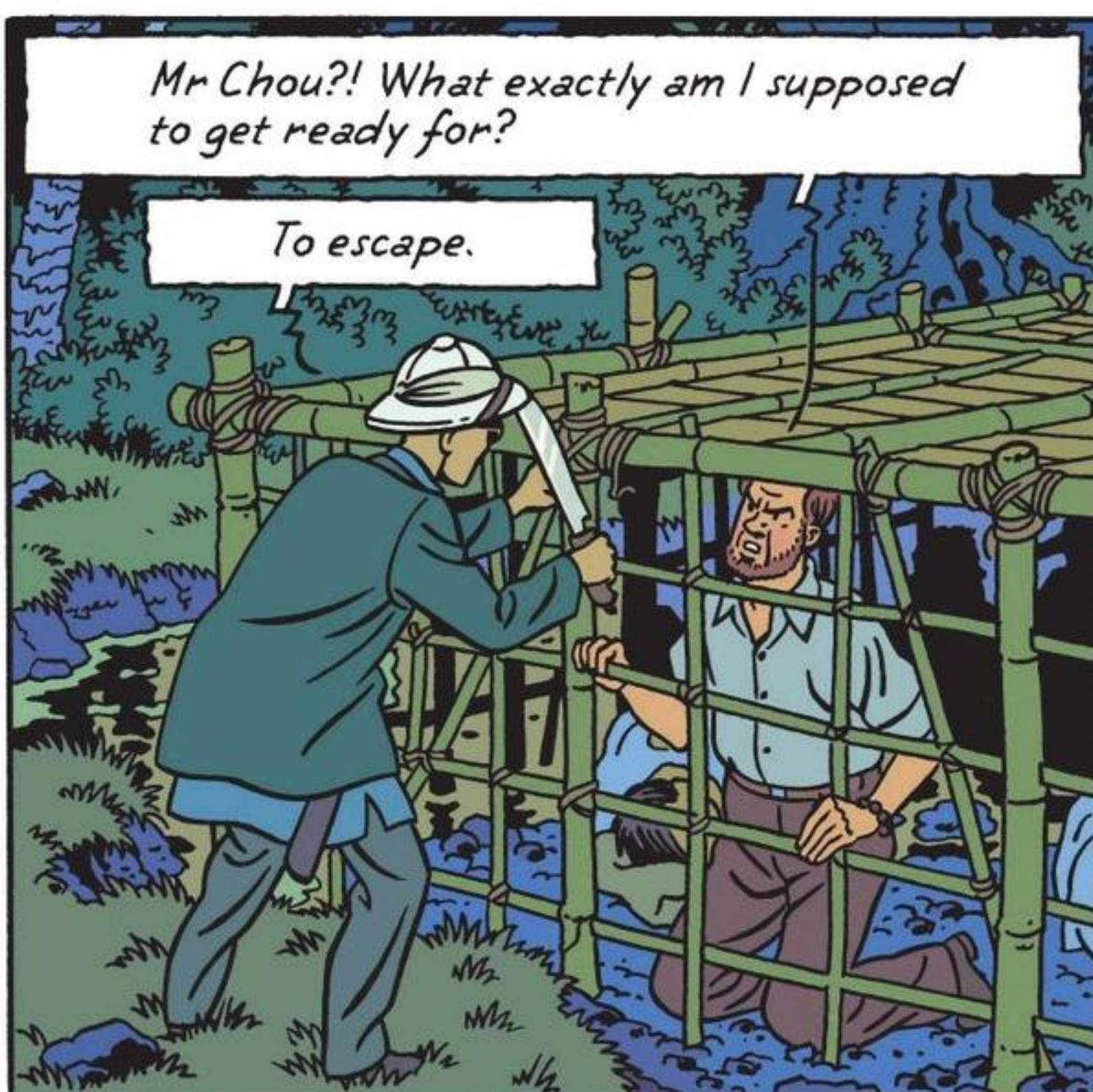


Shhhh!



Who's there? Who are you?

Shut up and get ready.



Mr Chou?! What exactly am I supposed to get ready for?

To escape.



Escape?! But ... to go where?

To the Valley of the Immortals. I have a feeling a scientifically-minded man such as you might help me reach it.



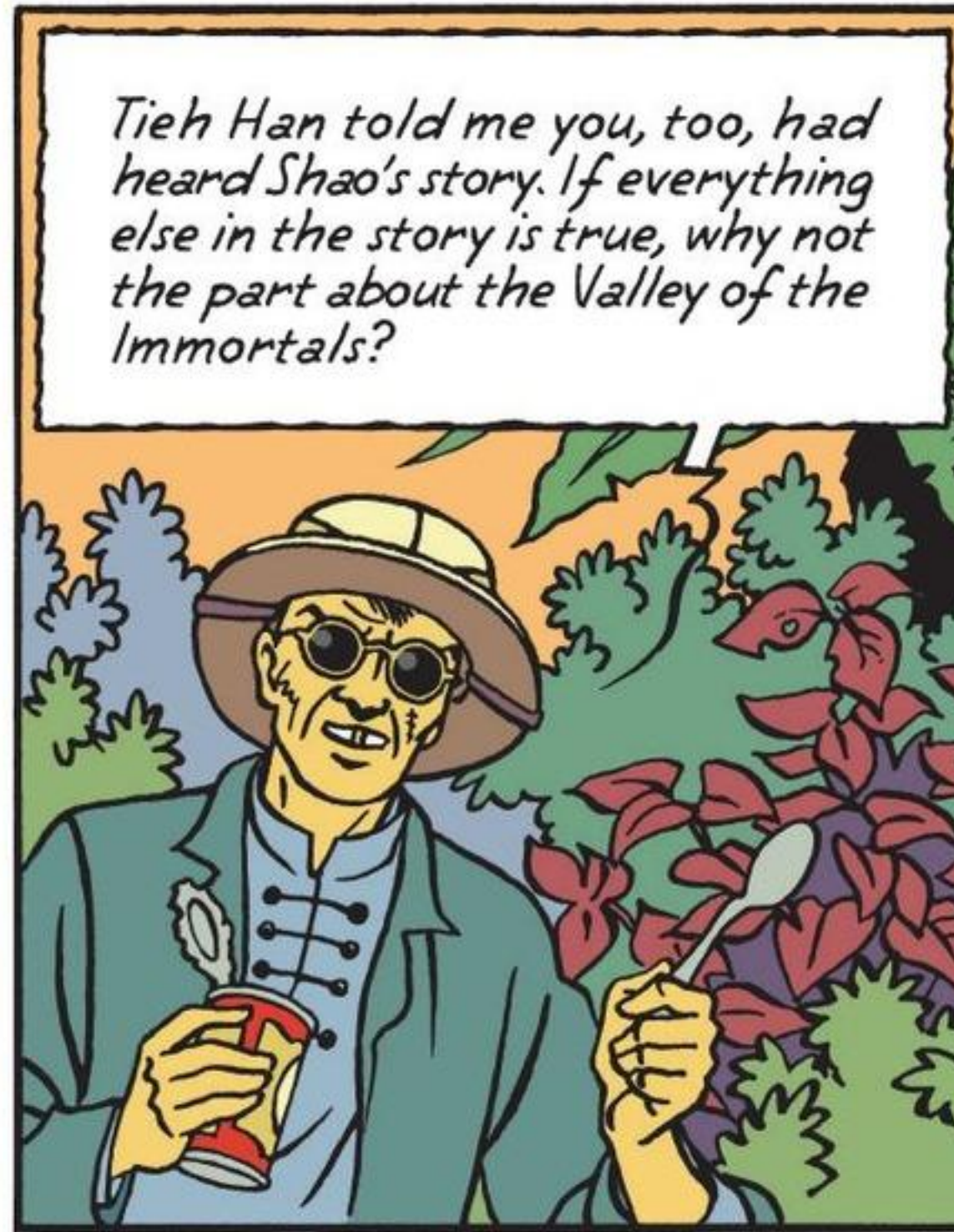
AT THAT MOMENT, DOZENS OF MILES TO THE SOUTH ...

We should sleep now. We'll have to set a faster pace tomorrow if we want to get there in time to save Mortimer.

Good night, Captain.



Are you ever going to give me some explanations, Mr Chou?



Tieh Han told me you, too, had heard Shao's story. If everything else in the story is true, why not the part about the Valley of the Immortals?

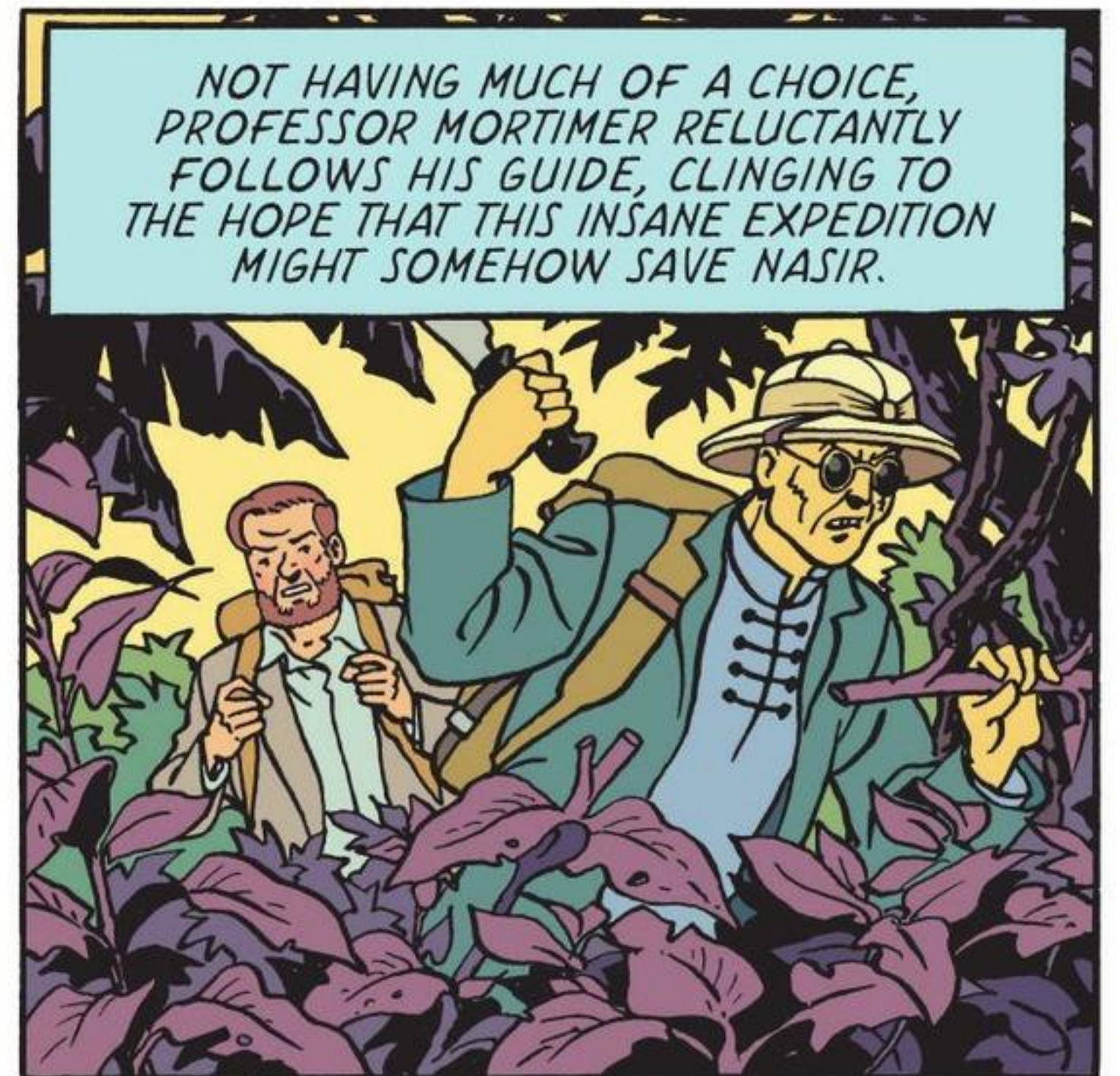
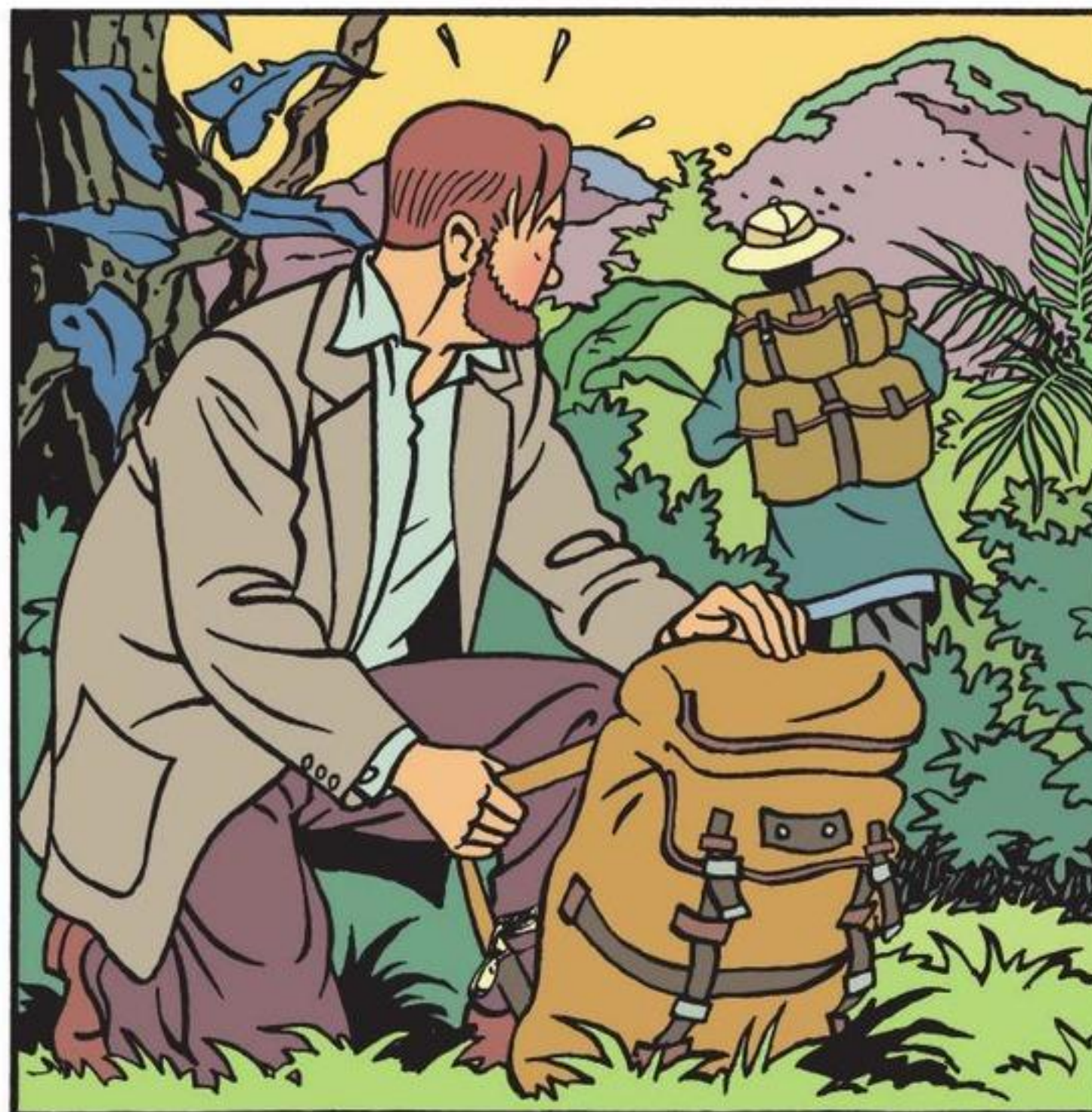


If it does exist, and you help me find it, you'll get the Pearl of Life that can save your friend ... and I'll find the emeralds that Emperor Shih-huang-ti once took there at old P'iao Chiu's request.

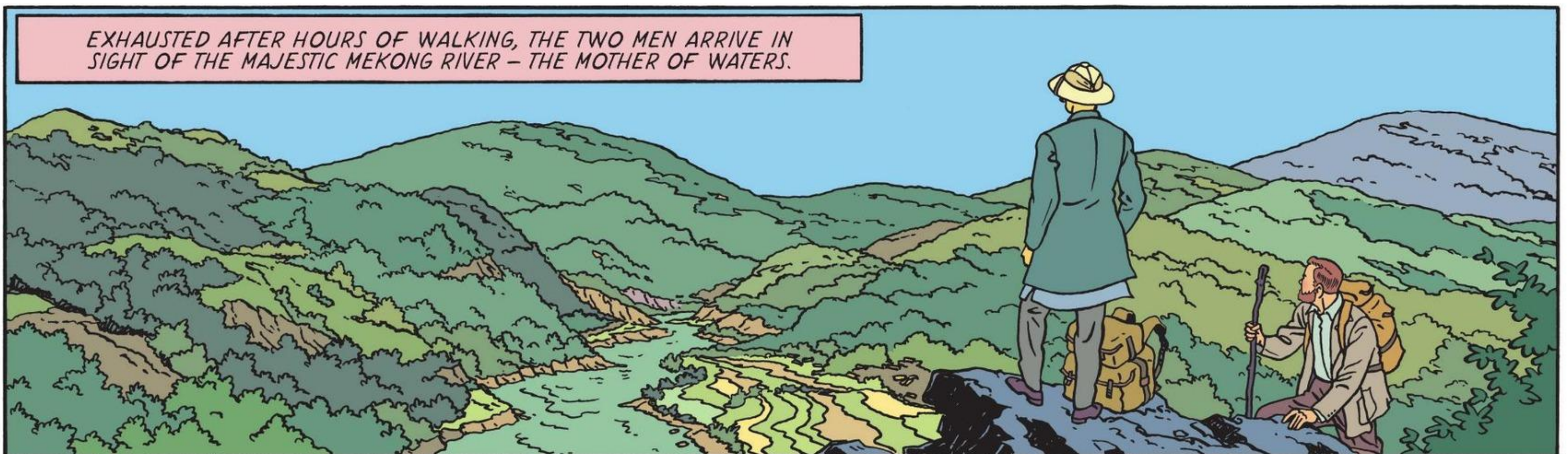


You want us to go traipsing through the jungle to look for a so-called Queen of Dragons in a valley full of immortal people?! Are you mad, man?!

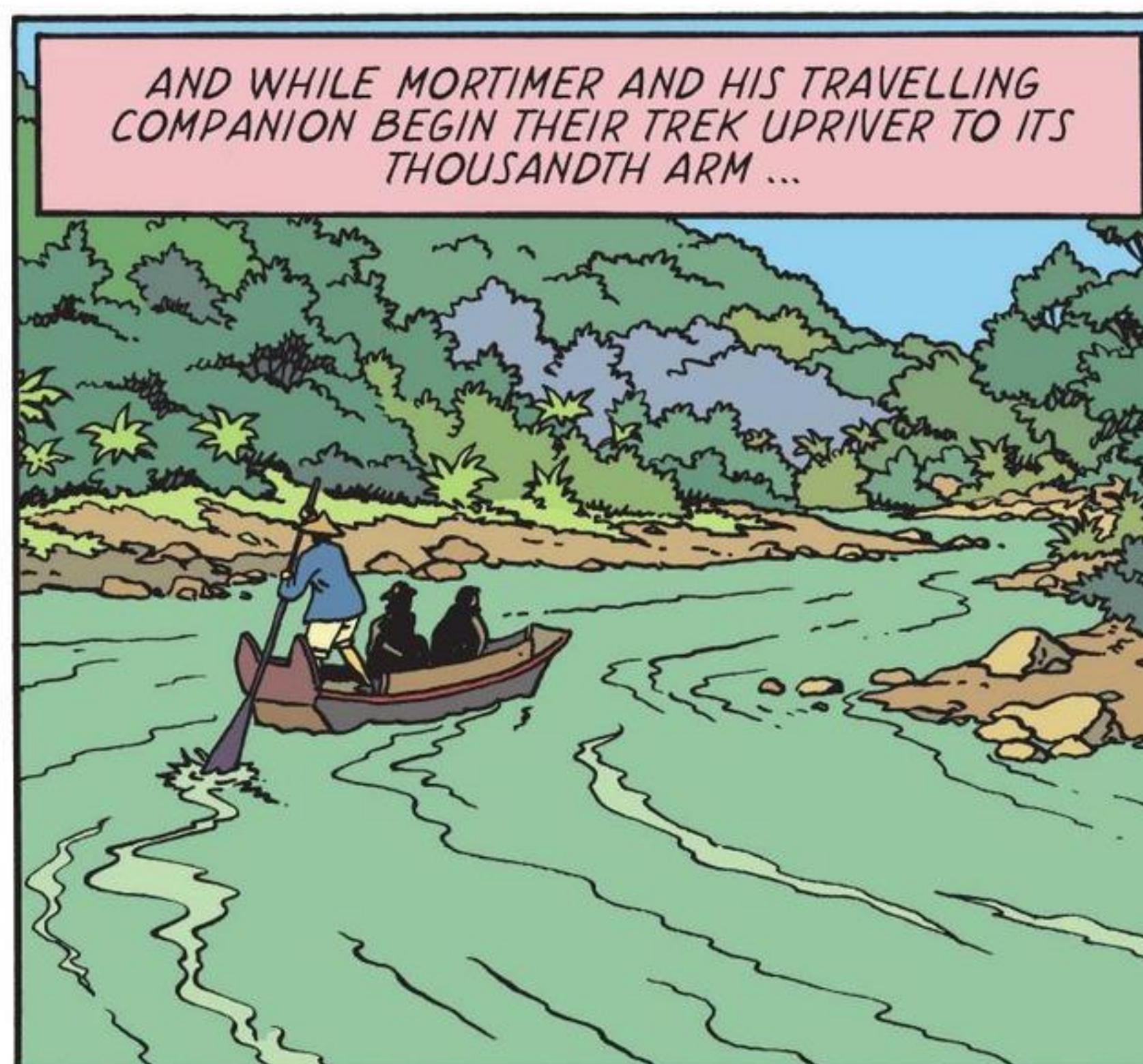
Is watching helplessly as your friend dies the sane option?



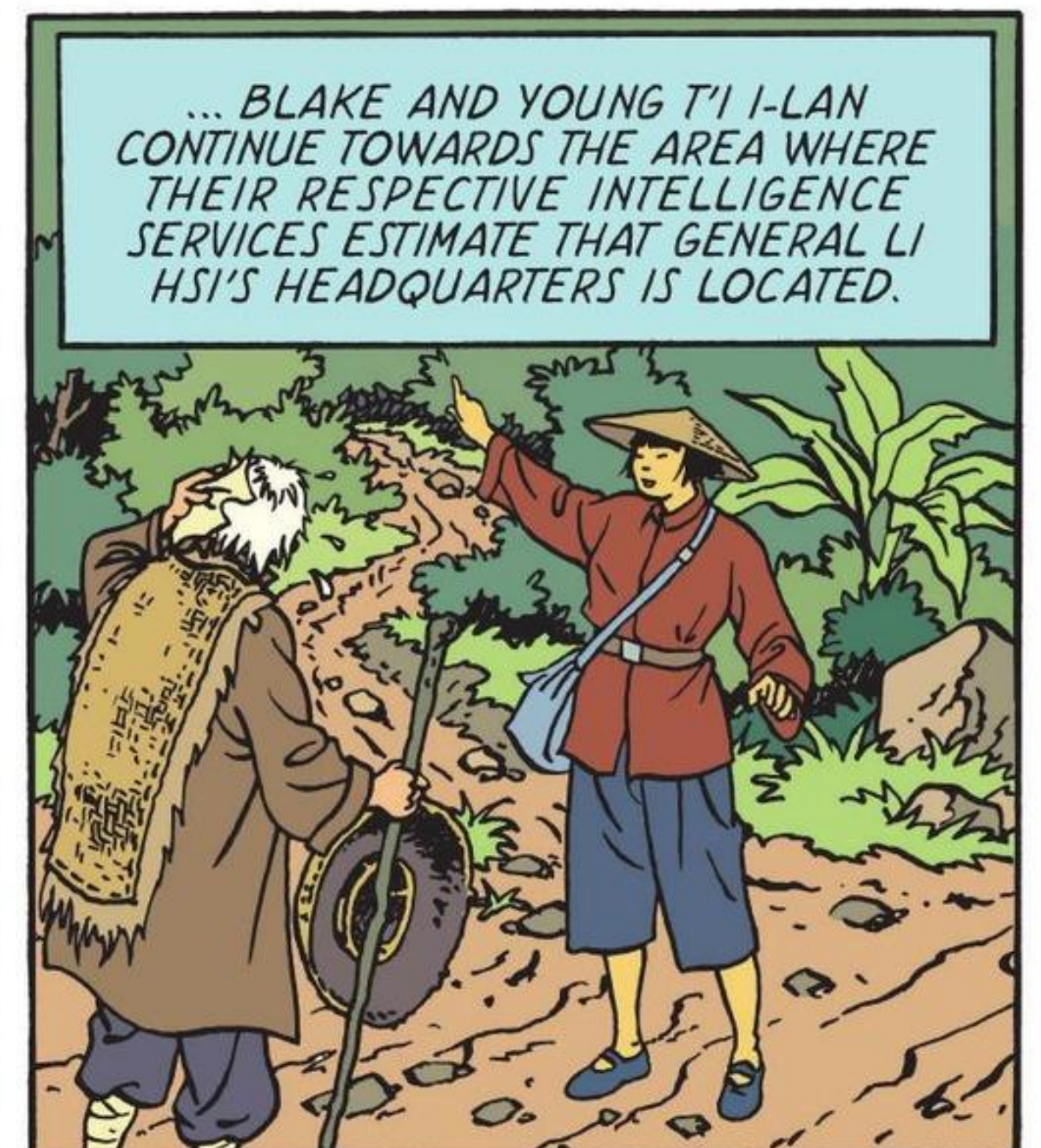
NOT HAVING MUCH OF A CHOICE, PROFESSOR MORTIMER RELUCTANTLY FOLLOWS HIS GUIDE, CLINGING TO THE HOPE THAT THIS INSANE EXPEDITION MIGHT SOMEHOW SAVE NASIR.



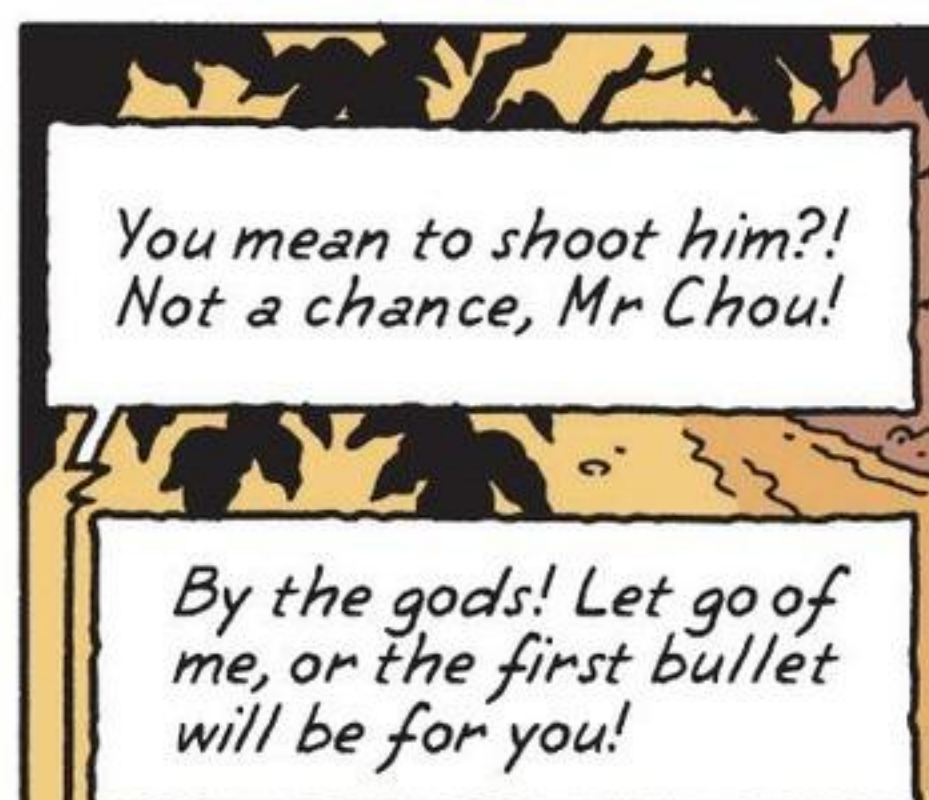
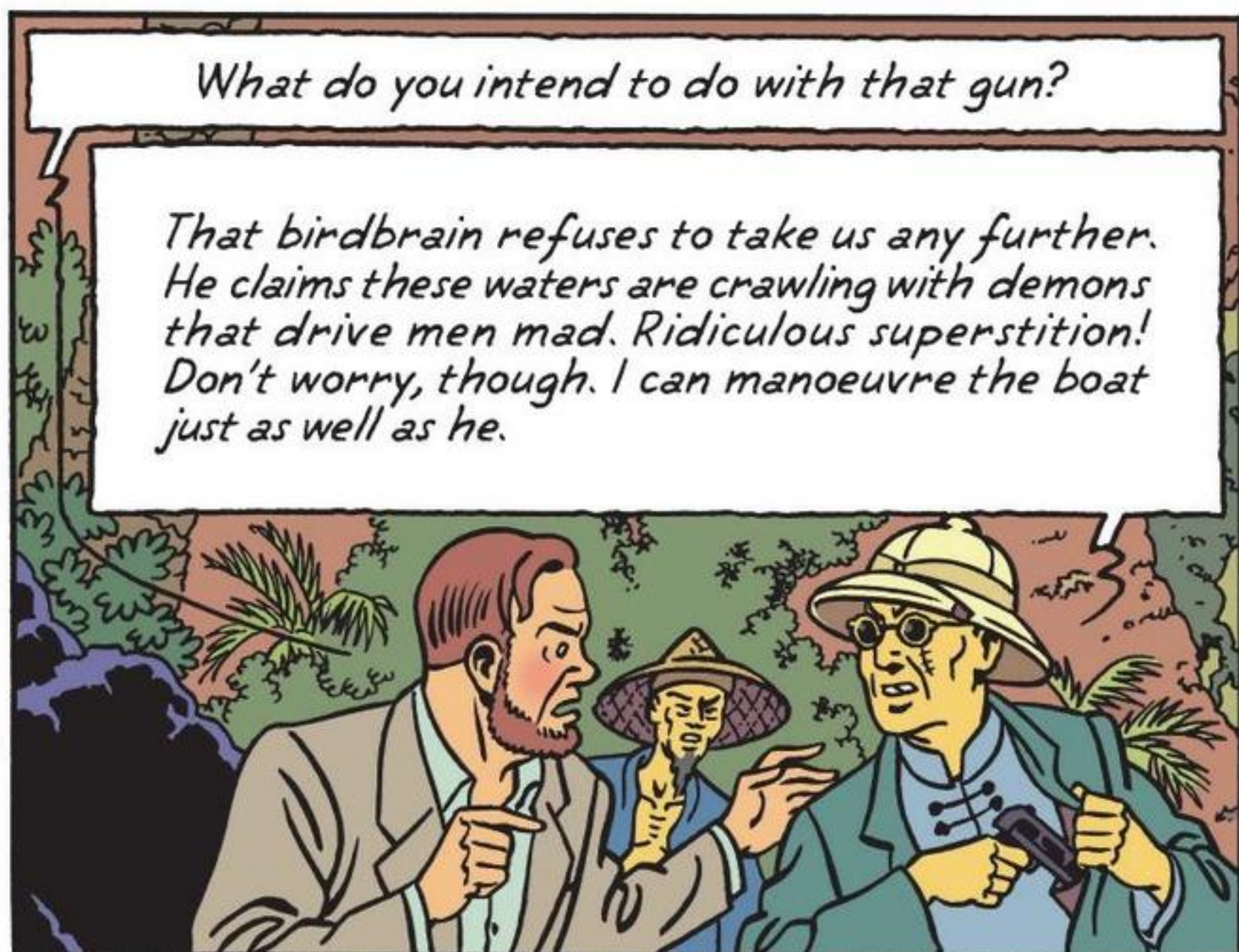
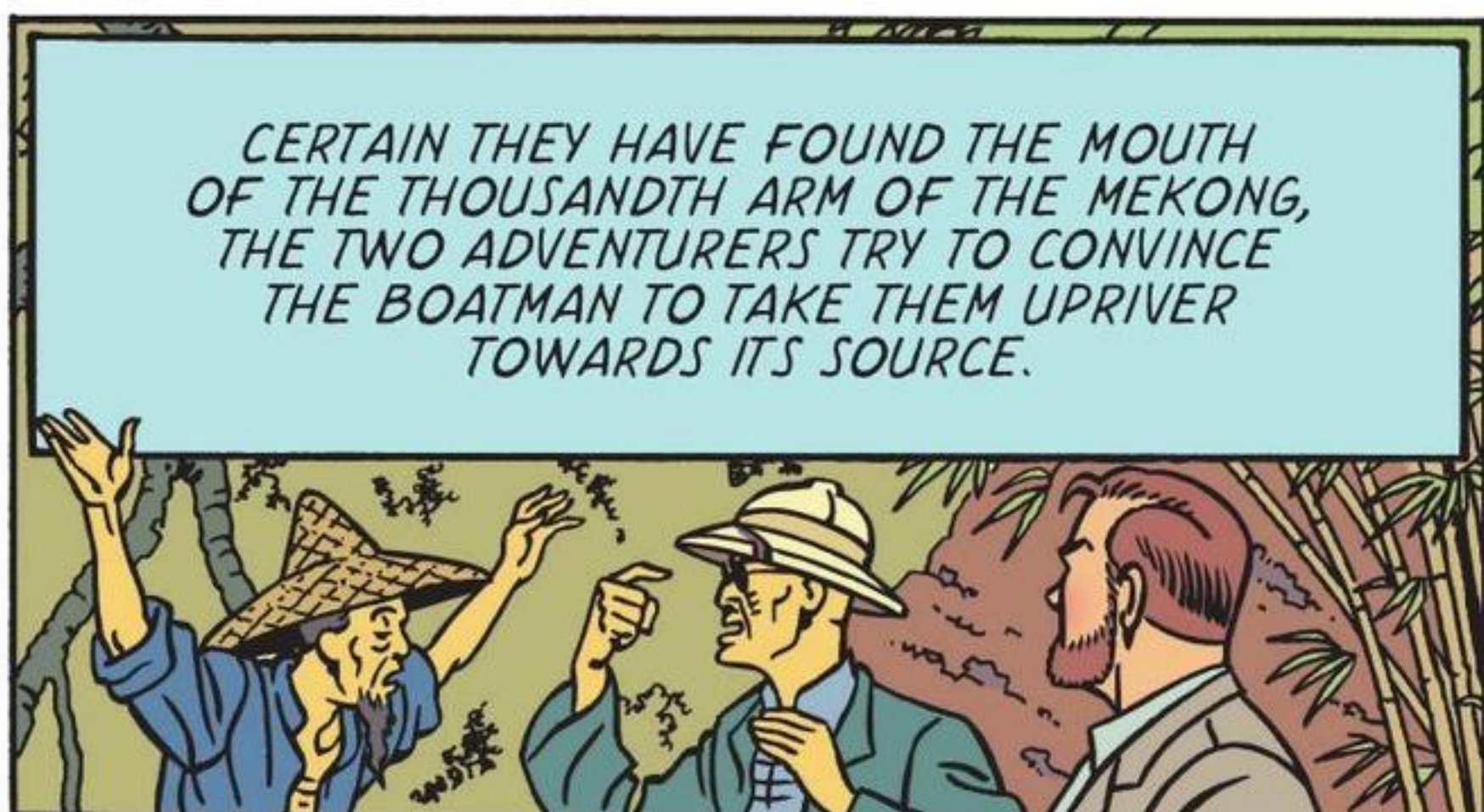
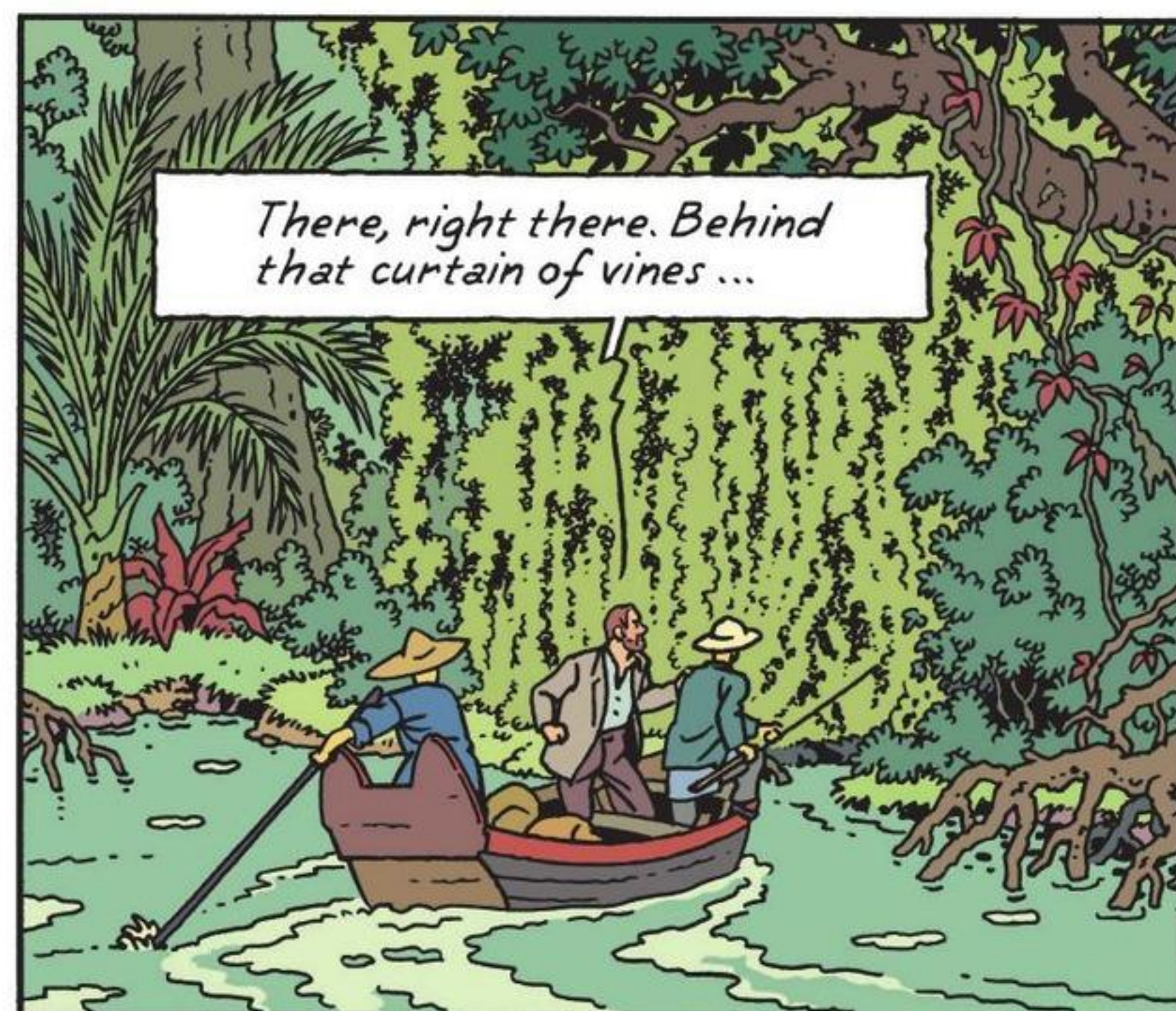
EXHAUSTED AFTER HOURS OF WALKING, THE TWO MEN ARRIVE IN SIGHT OF THE MAJESTIC MEKONG RIVER – THE MOTHER OF WATERS.

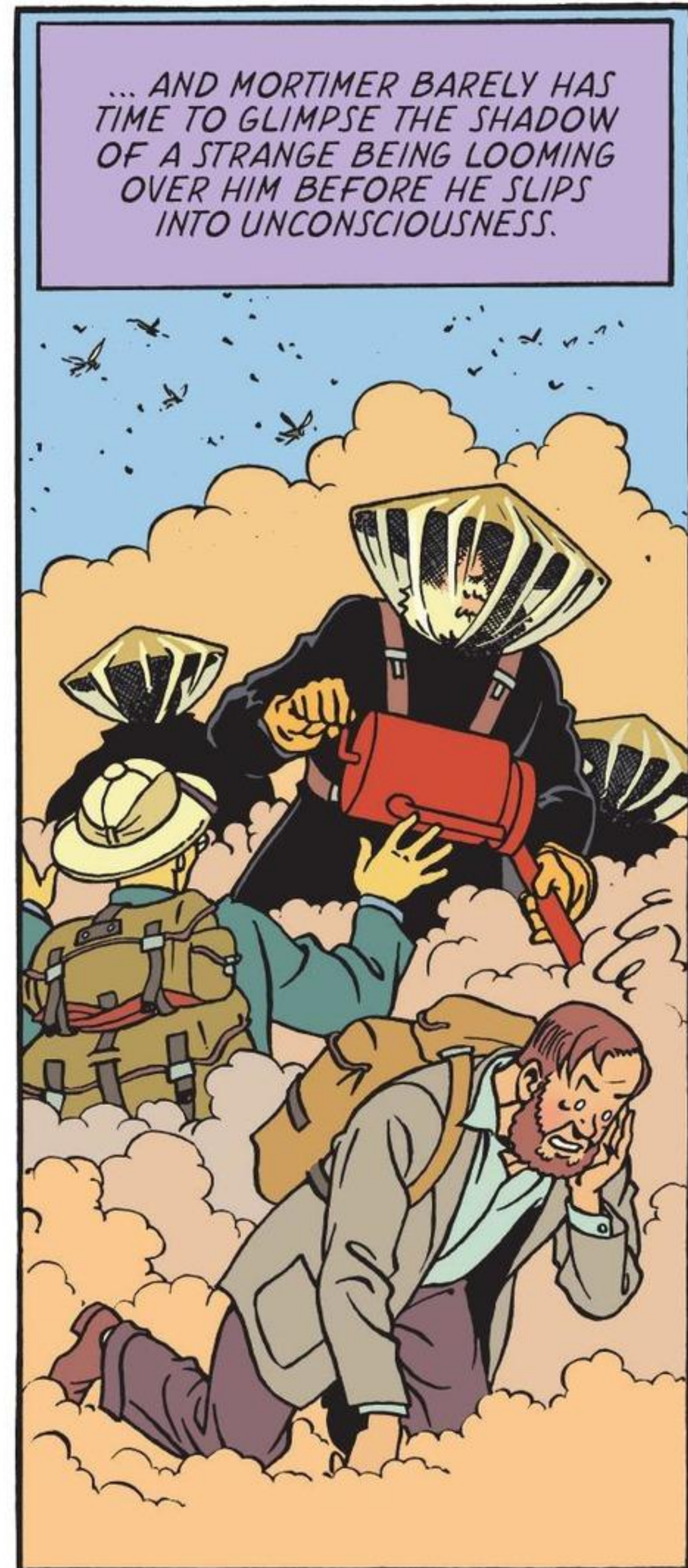
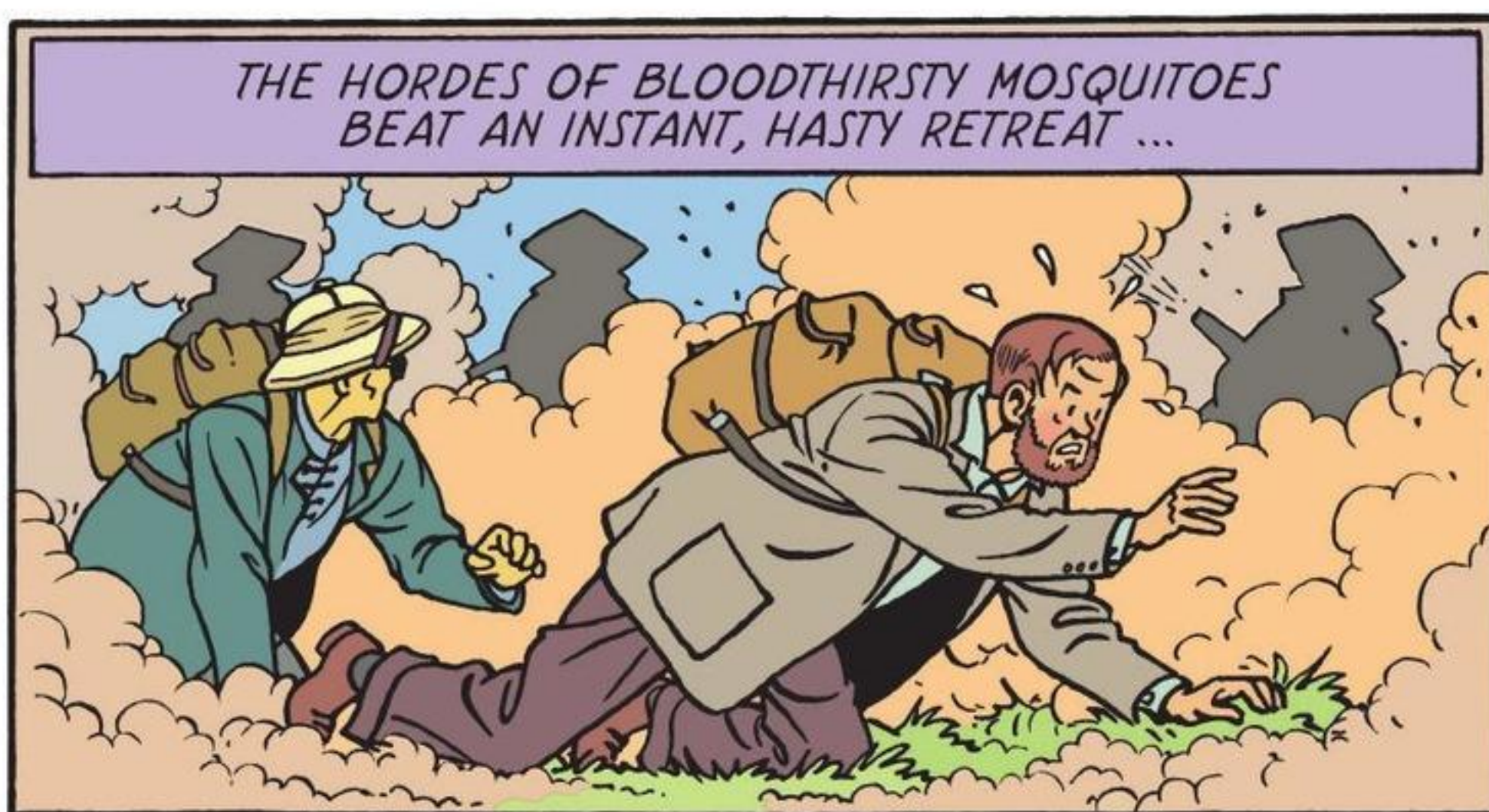
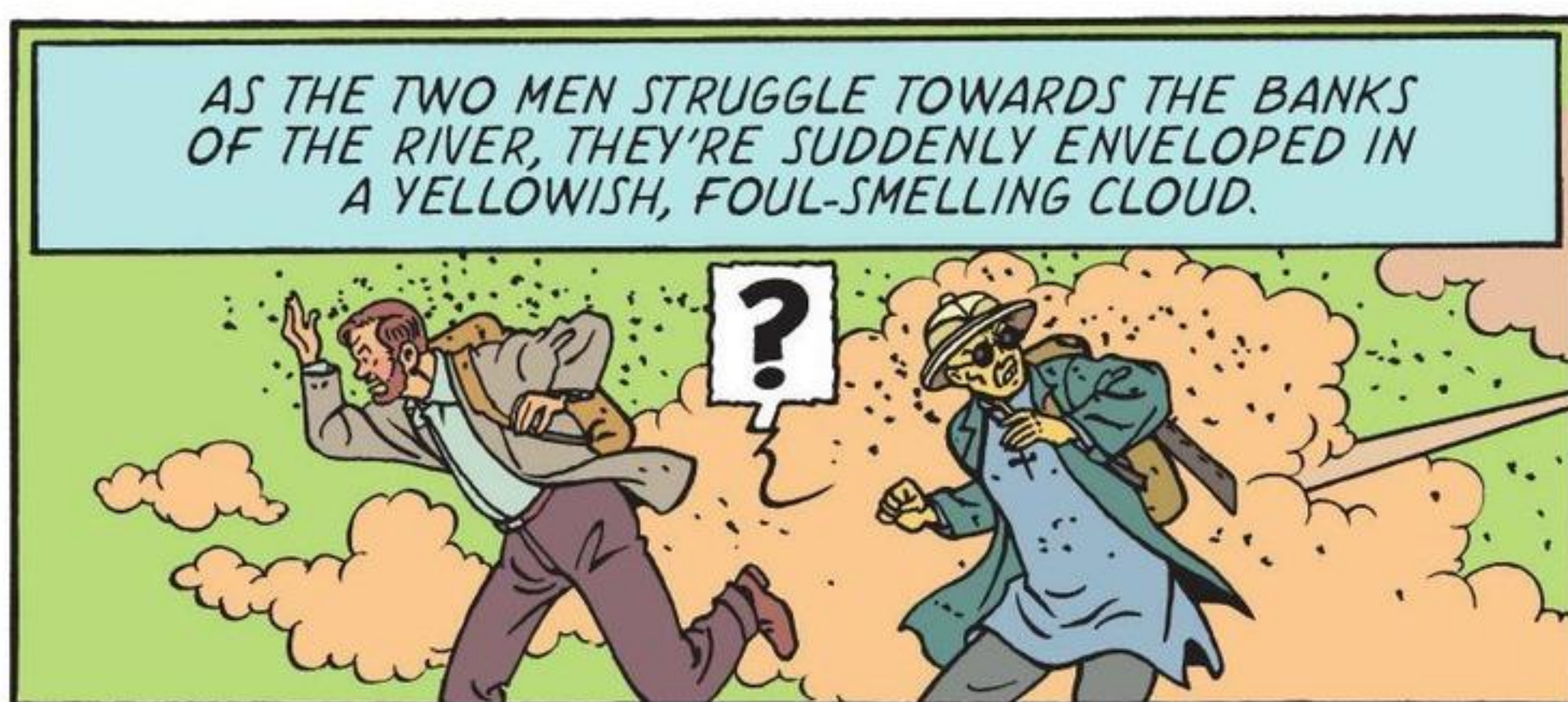
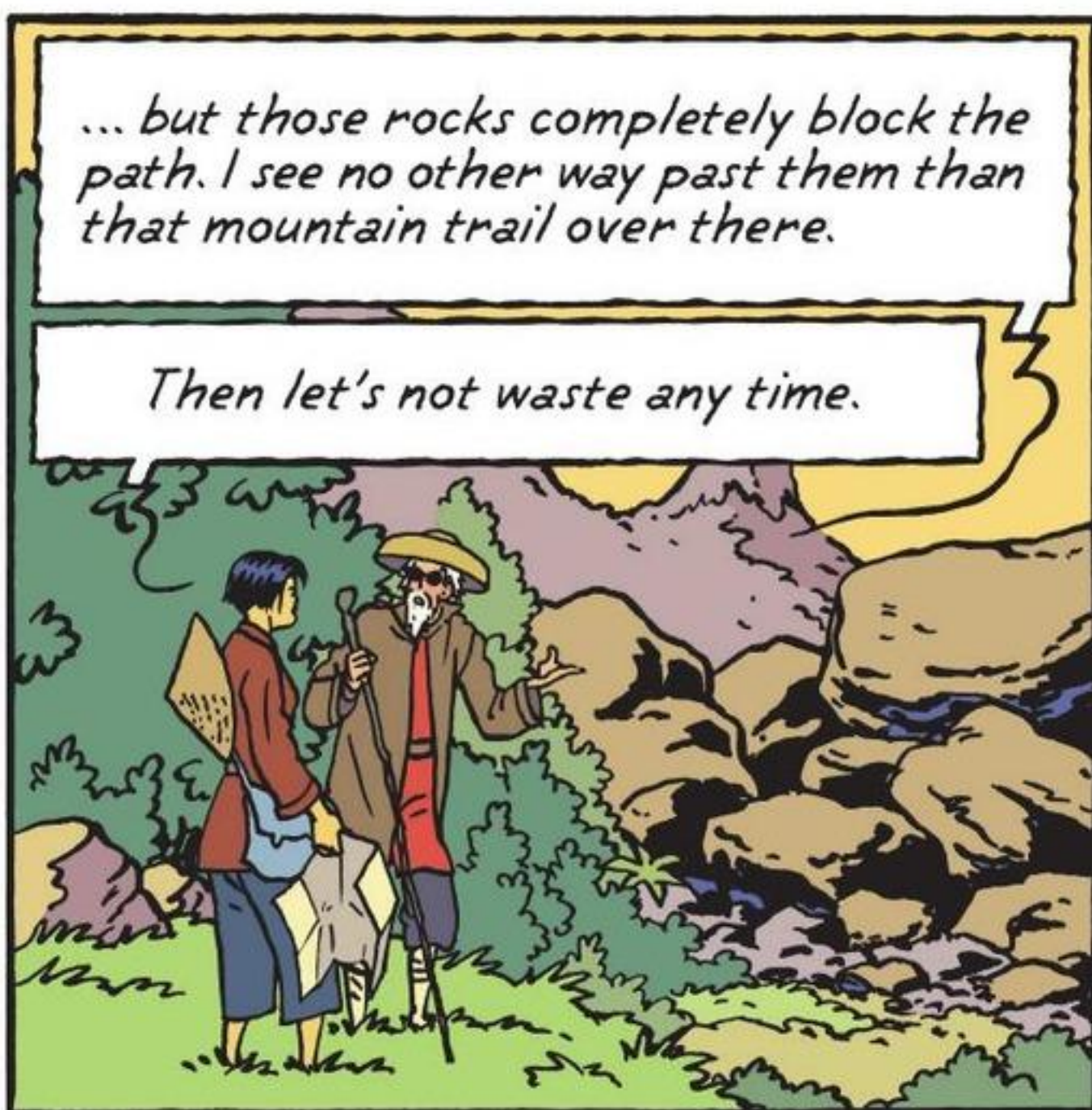
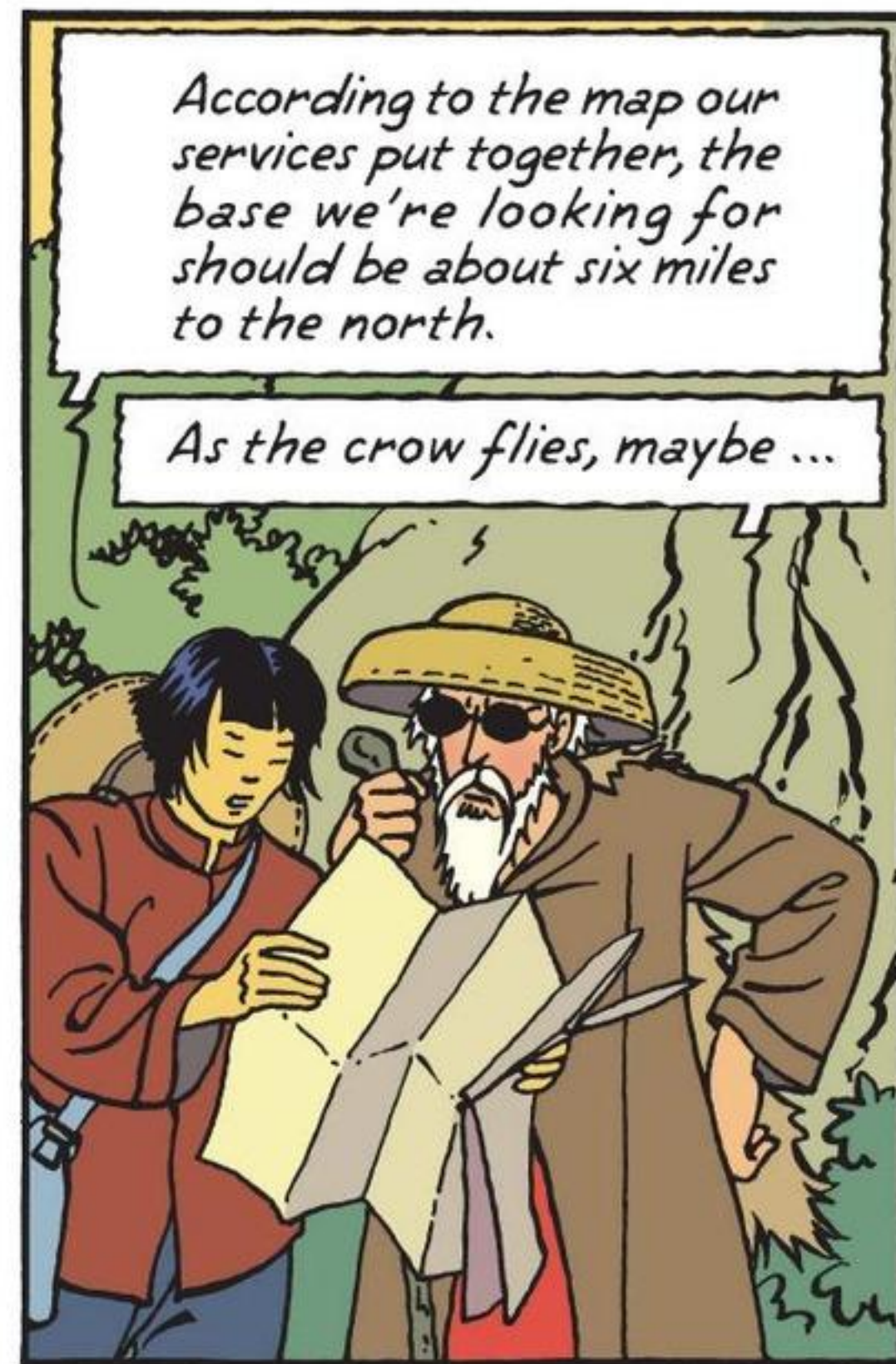


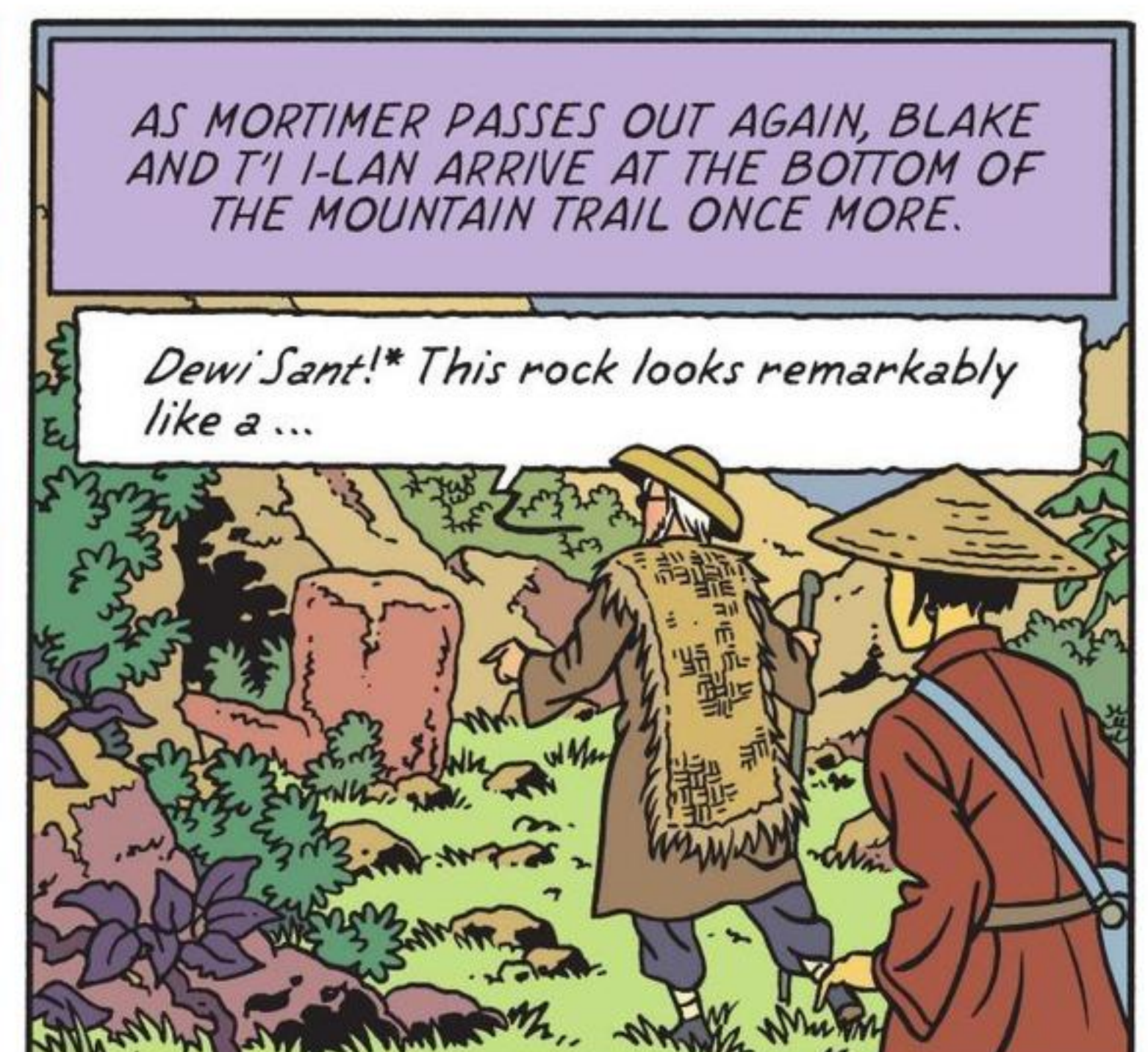
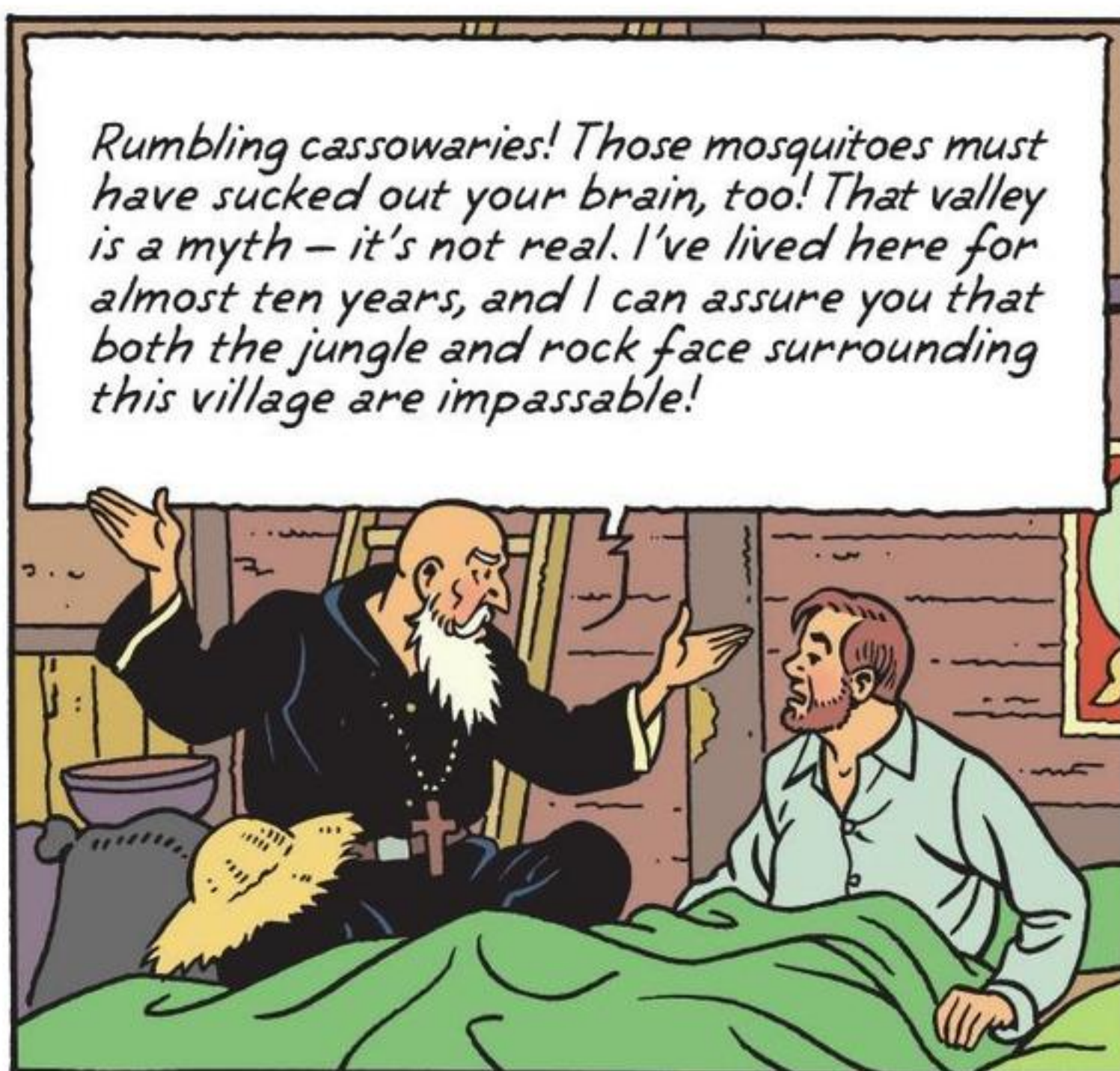
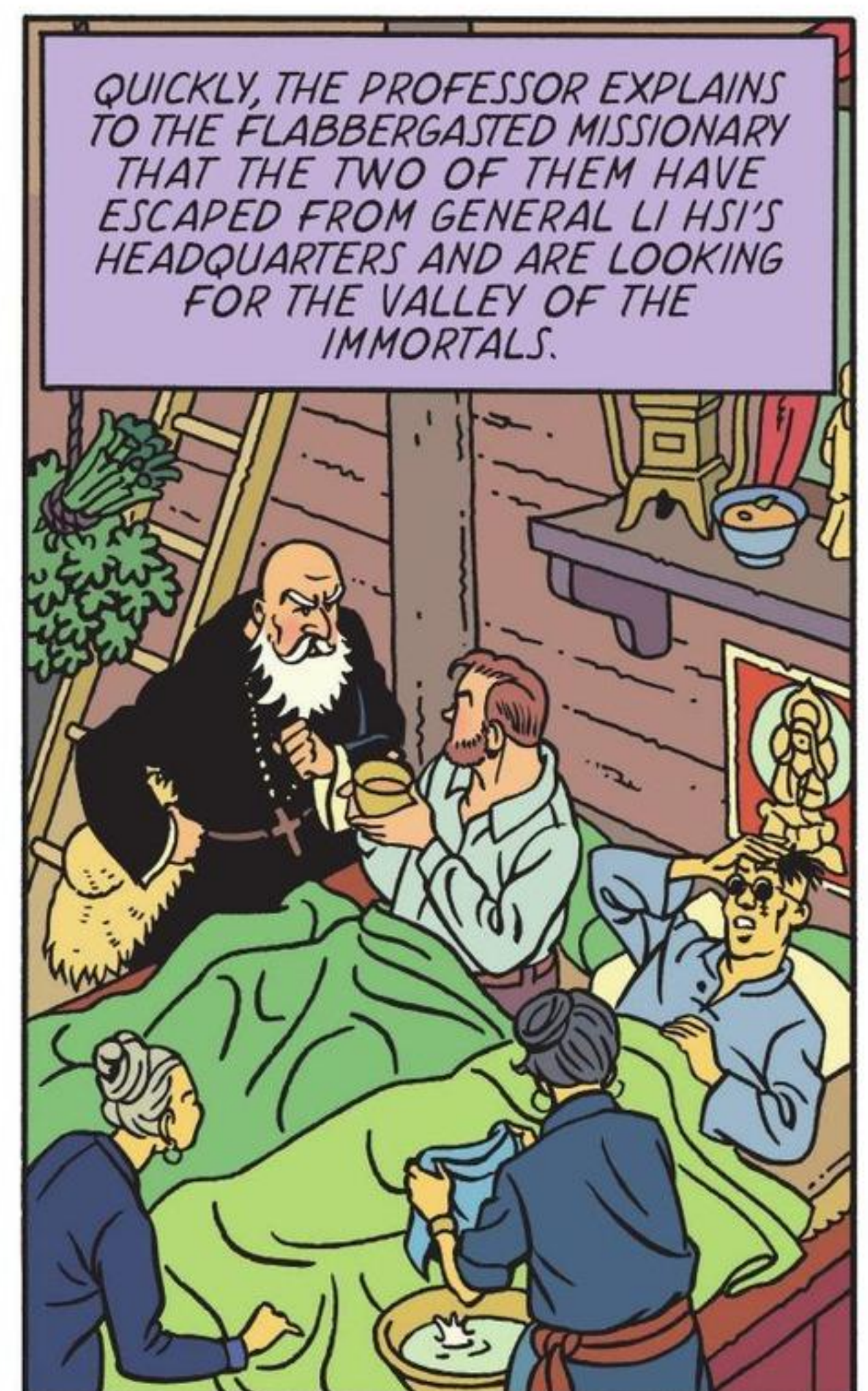
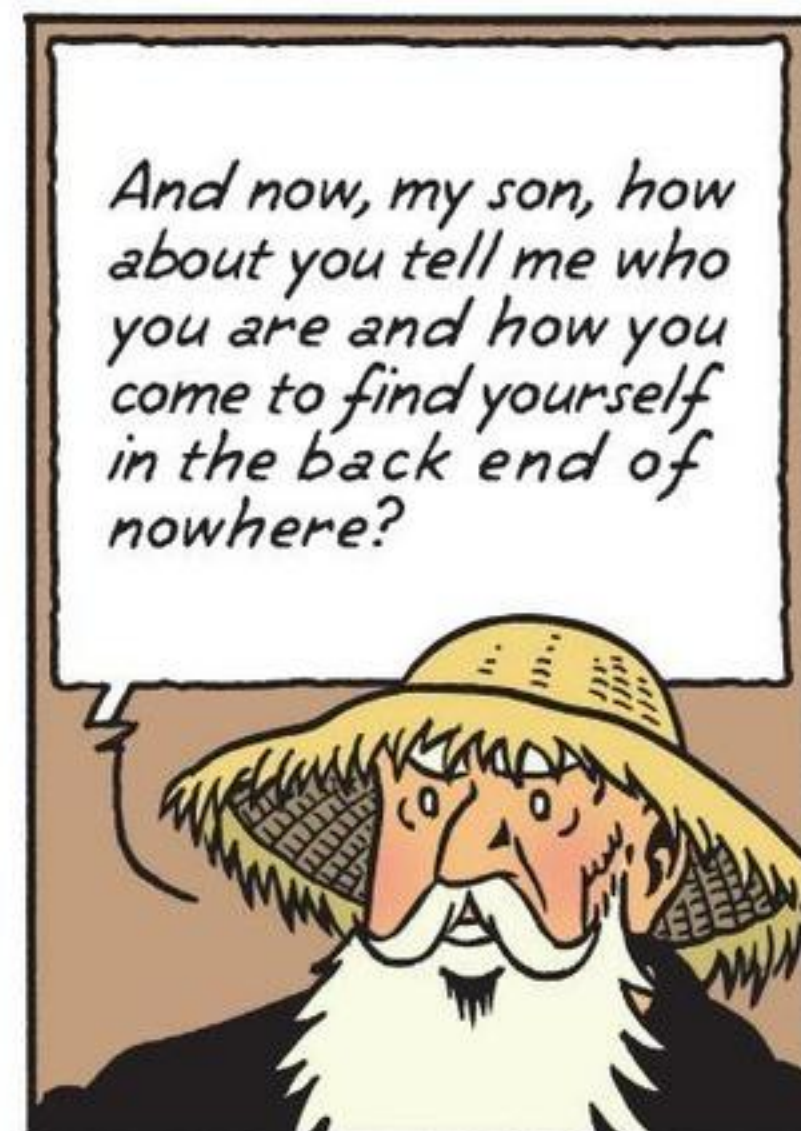
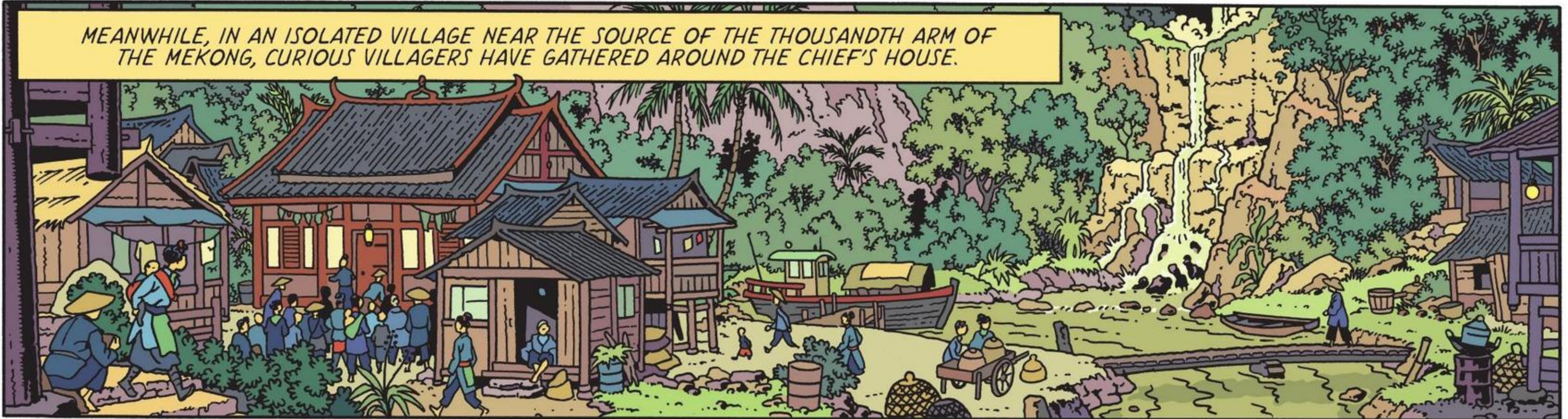
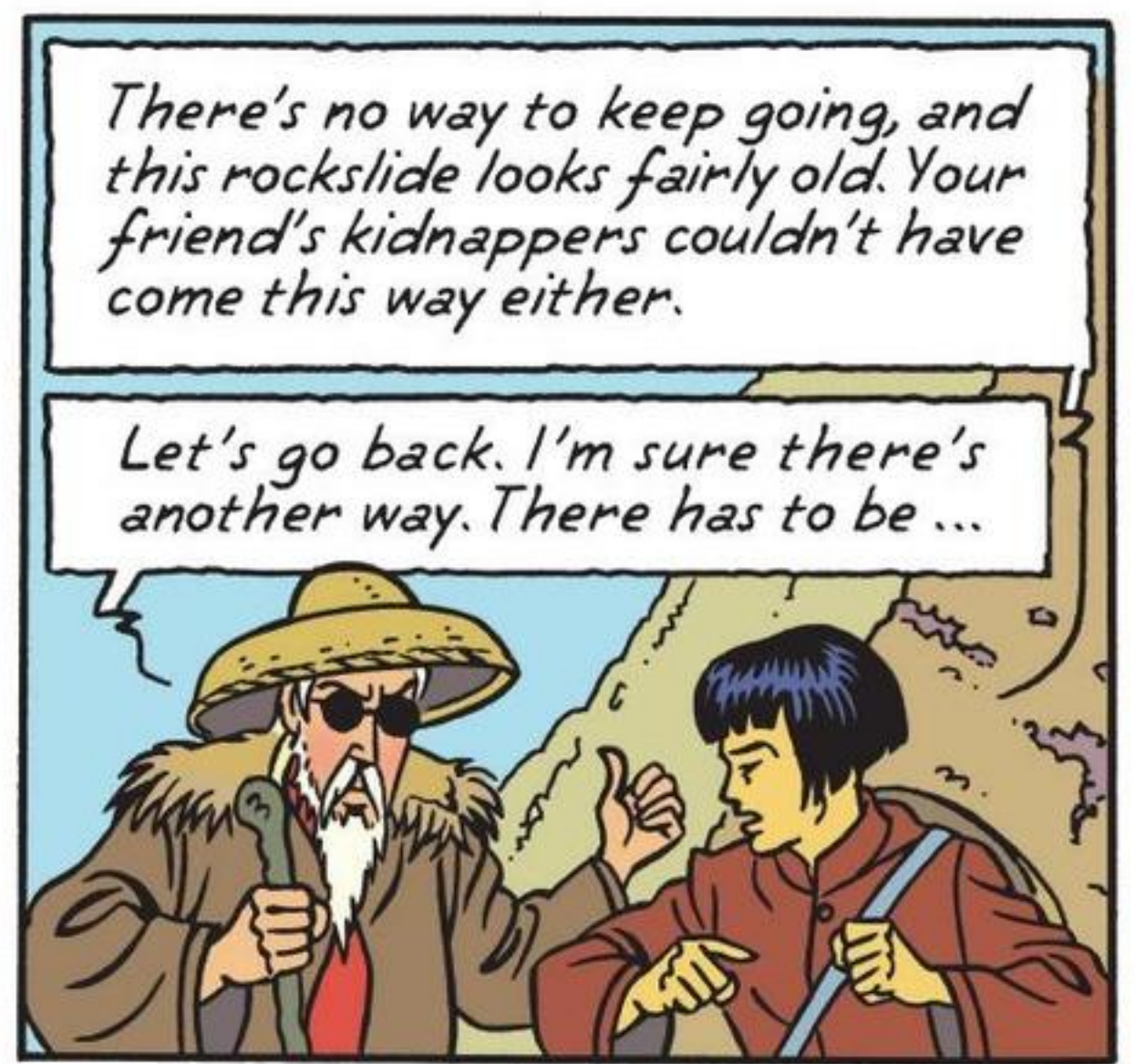
AND WHILE MORTIMER AND HIS TRAVELLING COMPANION BEGIN THEIR TREK UPRIVER TO ITS THOUSANDTH ARM ...



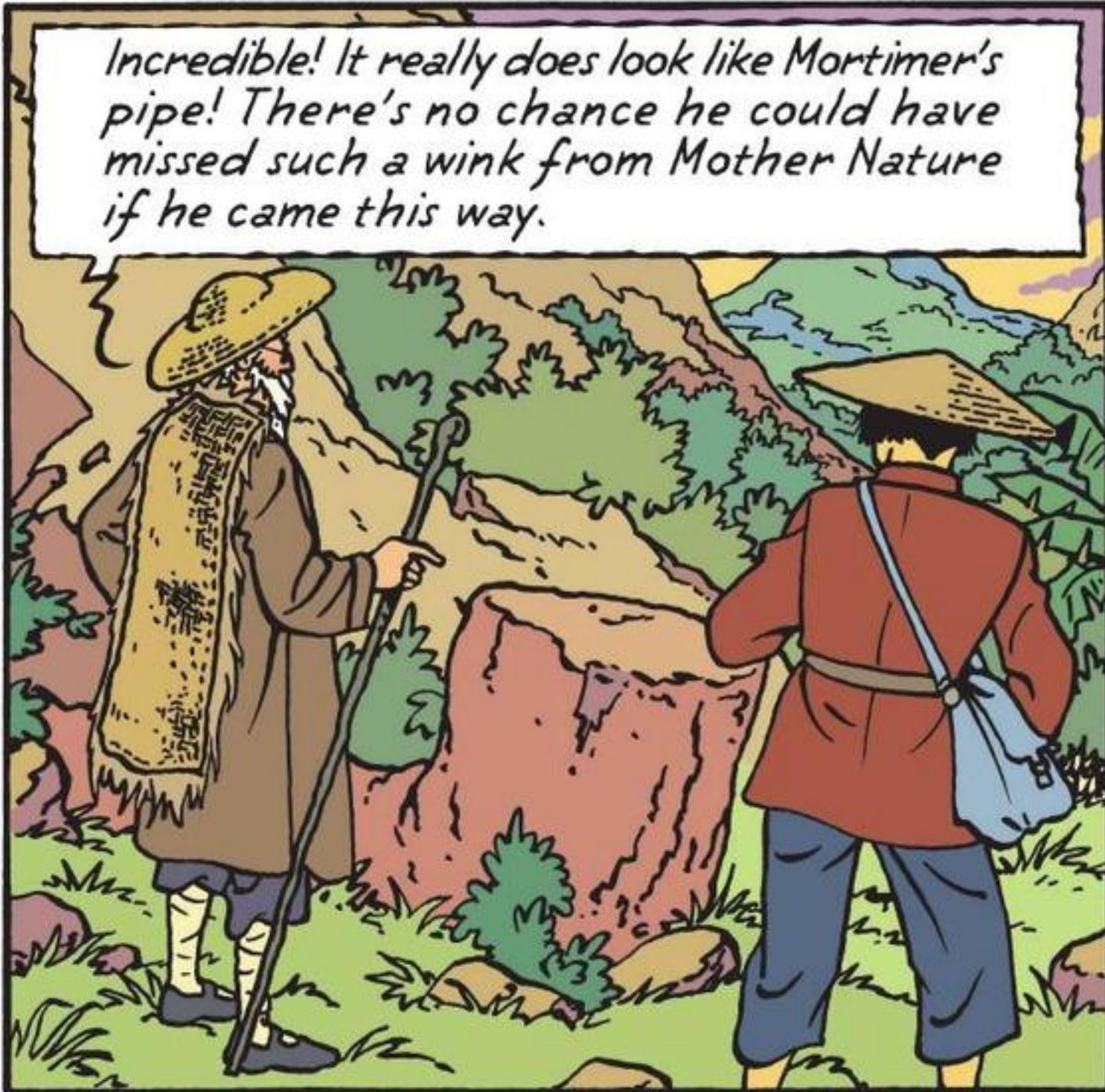
... BLAKE AND YOUNG T'I I-LAN CONTINUE TOWARDS THE AREA WHERE THEIR RESPECTIVE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES ESTIMATE THAT GENERAL LI HSI'S HEADQUARTERS IS LOCATED.







*'SAINT DAVID' IN WELSH (BLAKE WAS BORN IN WALES)



Incredible! It really does look like Mortimer's pipe! There's no chance he could have missed such a wink from Mother Nature if he came this way.



Which means he may have figured ... Yes!



Look! It's a wooden bead from the mala Mortimer is wearing. If the professor left it here ...



... it must be to let you know there's something to find on this spot.

It must be a way through! We need to find it before night falls.



IN THE VILLAGE THAT RESCUED MORTIMER AND CHOU, EVERYONE IS ASLEEP ...



Professor! Wake up!

Hmmm?



What's going on? Is something wrong?!

On the contrary.

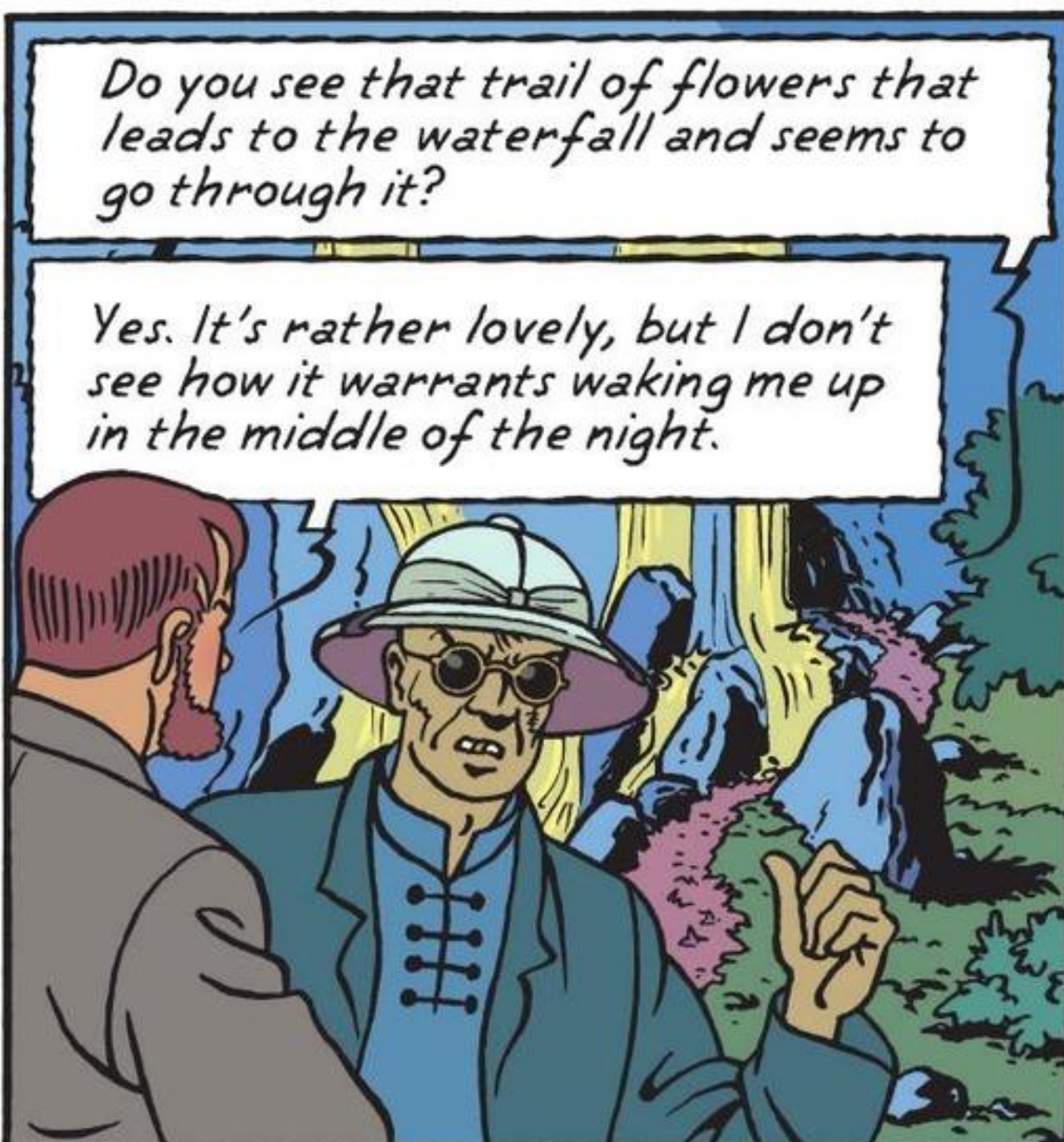


The plant decoction those old healers made me inhale worked wonders! Come with me! I found something outside ...



SURPRISED TO UNEXPECTEDLY FIND HIMSELF IN EXCELLENT SHAPE AS WELL, THE PROFESSOR FOLLOWS HIS COMPANION TO THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE VILLAGE.

Look!



Do you see that trail of flowers that leads to the waterfall and seems to go through it?

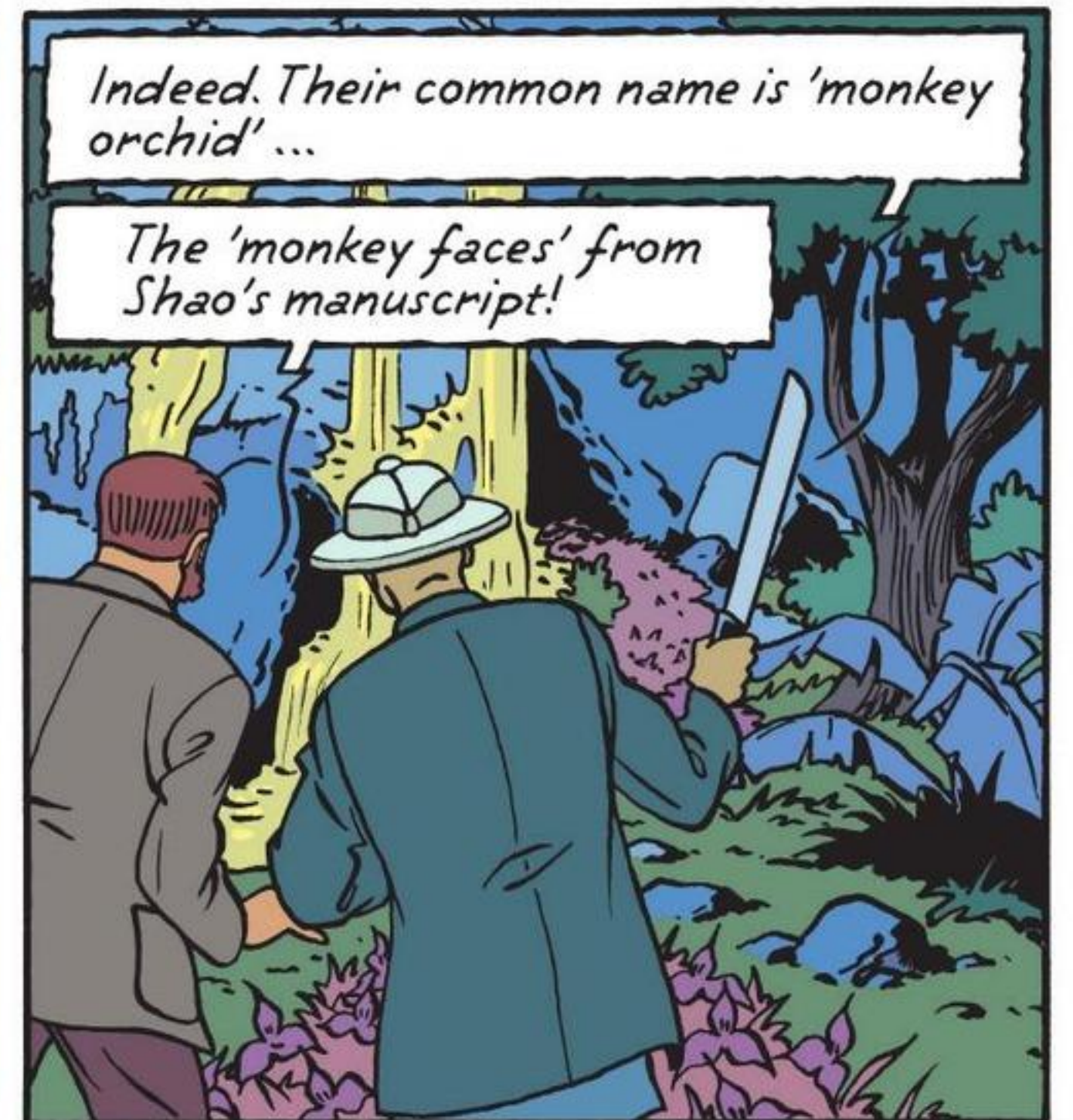
Yes. It's rather lovely, but I don't see how it warrants waking me up in the middle of the night.



That's because you don't know what flowers those are. They're a rare species of orchids called *Dracula gigas*. They're among the things I trade in back in Hong Kong.

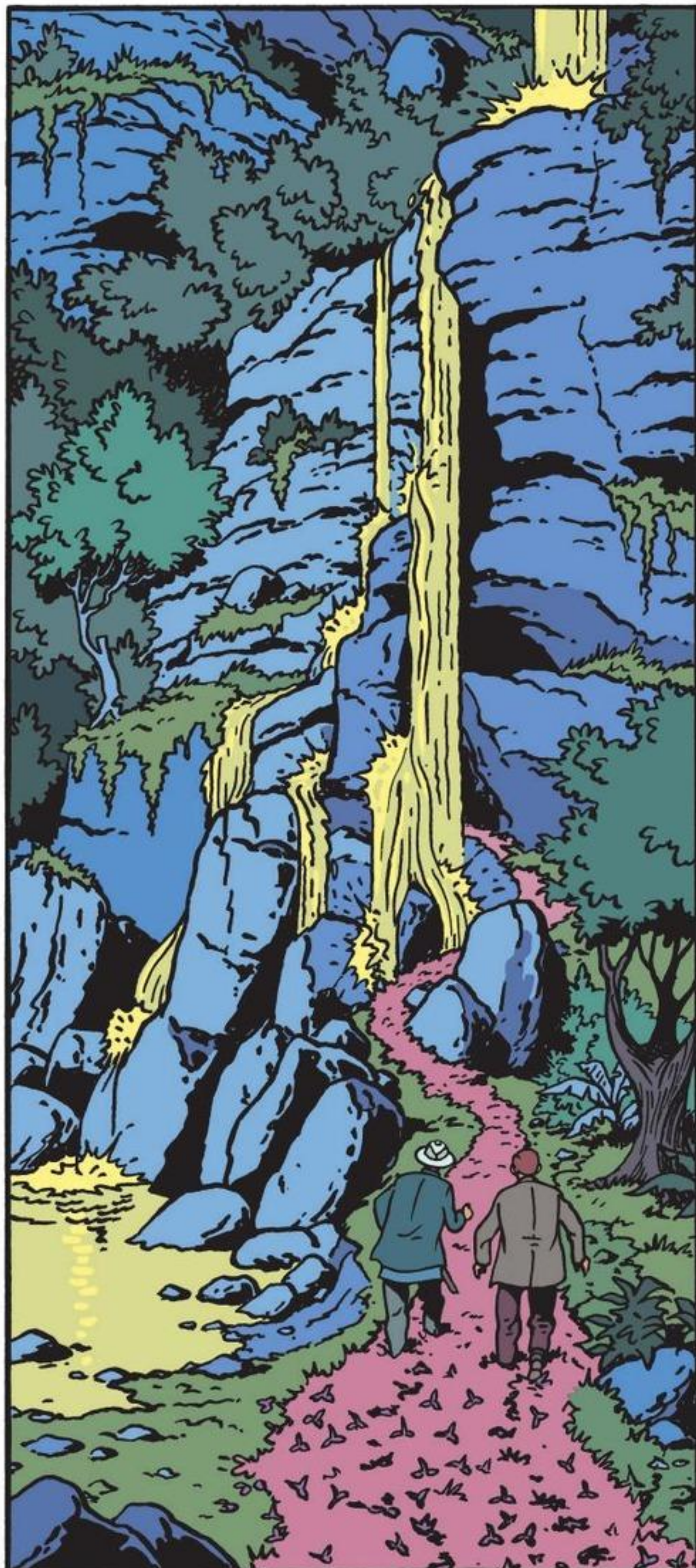
Look at them from straight ahead ...

Strange. It looks like they're the ones looking at us ...



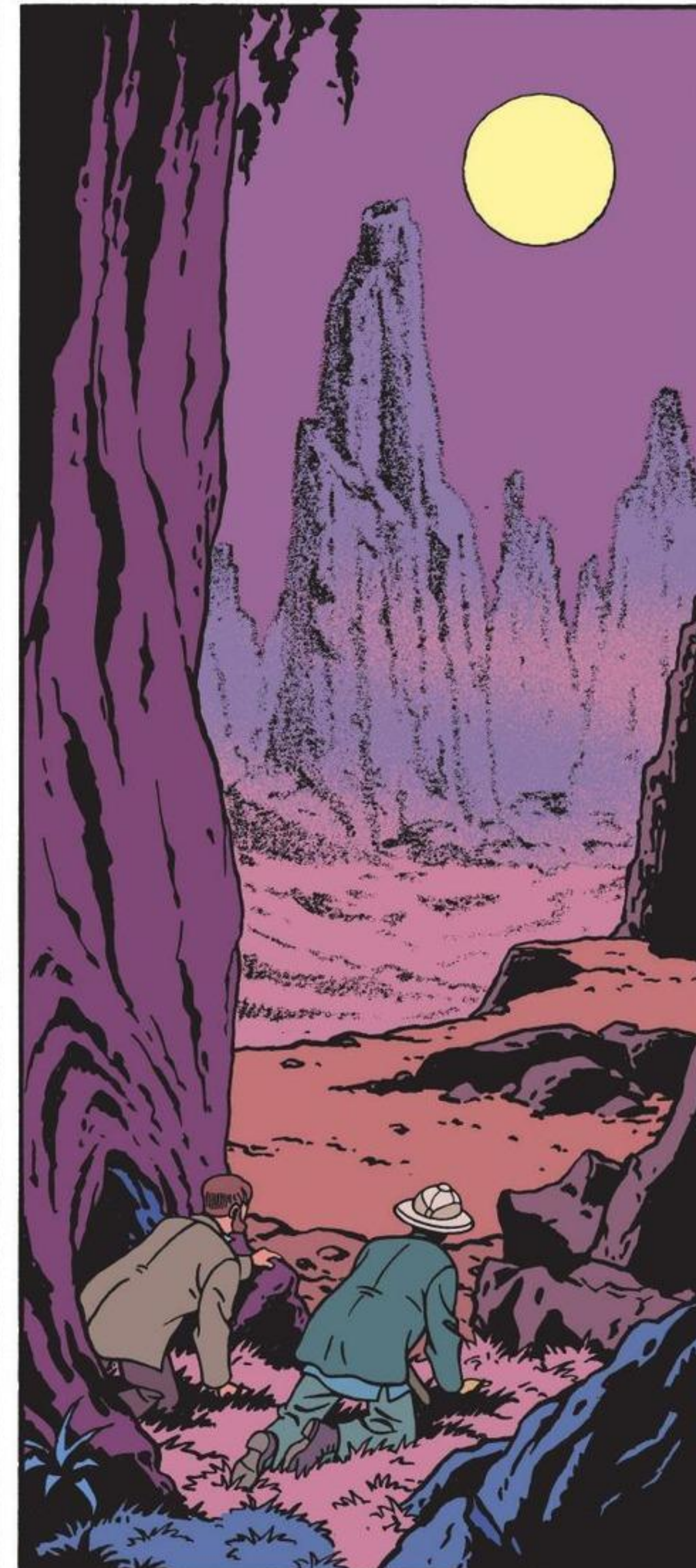
Indeed. Their common name is 'monkey orchid' ...

The 'monkey faces' from Shao's manuscript!



It looks like the trail of flowers continues inside that tunnel ...

Let's follow it.



Remember Shao's text.

'...you must follow the Carpet of Monkey Faces and cross ... the Forest of Stone'. Well, there's the Forest of Stone!



EARS PRICKED, LISTENING FOR THE SLIGHTEST NOISE, THE TWO MEN BRAVELY SET OUT BETWEEN THE FIRST MONOLITHS.



Wait! Did you hear something?

No, nothing. Come now, Professor! Aren't you Britons supposed to be unflap—

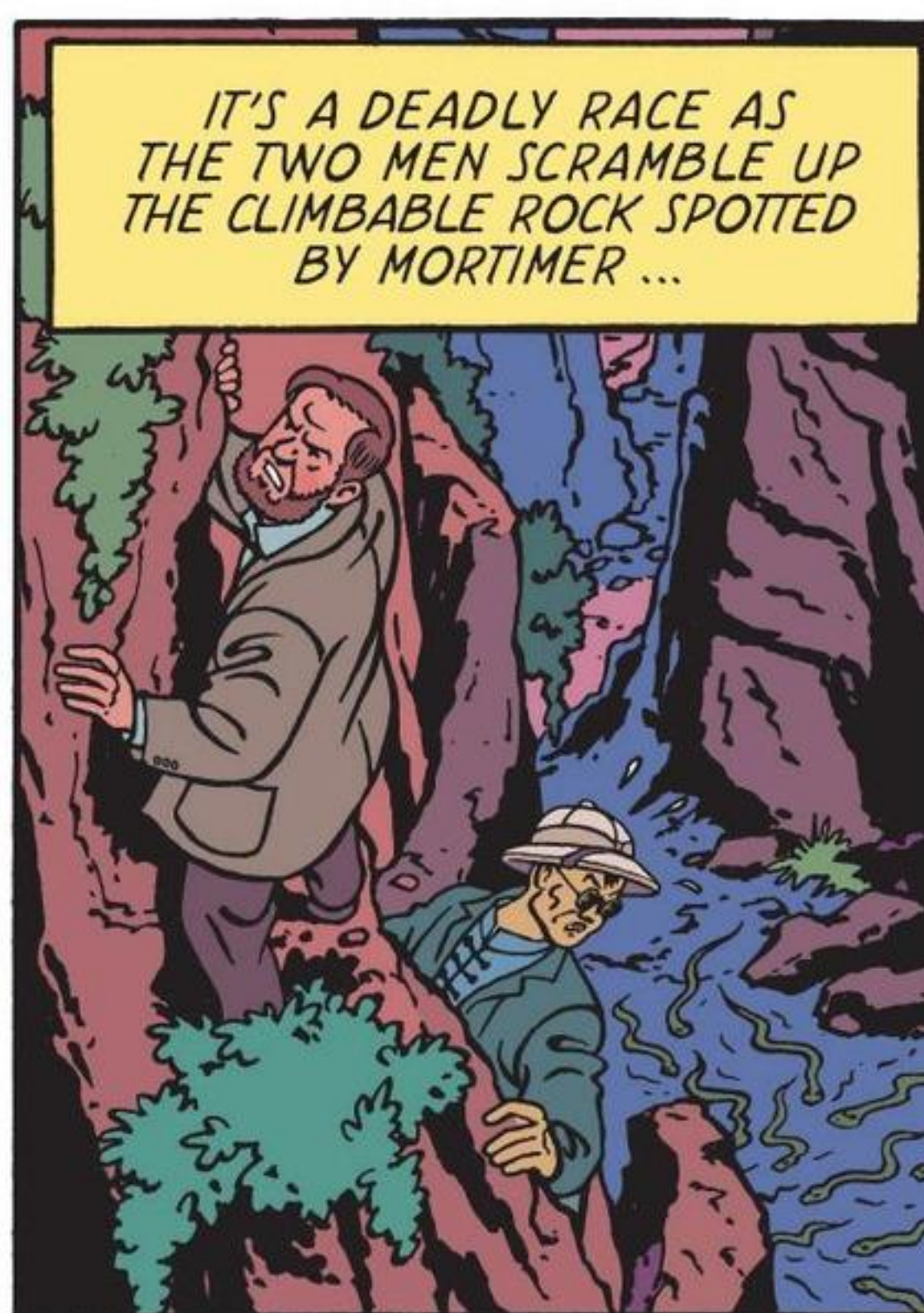


SUDDENLY, OUT OF NOWHERE, DOZENS OF SLITHERING, MENACING SHADOWS APPEAR.

Snakes! We need to get to high ground—now!



Follow me!



IT'S A DEADLY RACE AS THE TWO MEN SCRAMBLE UP THE CLIMBABLE ROCK SPOTTED BY MORTIMER ...



Phew, we made it! ... We'll have to spend the rest of the night here and hope those blasted things return to their dens at dawn ...

THE SUN IS RISING AS MORTIMER AND HIS COMPANION WAKE UP, AFTER A NIGHT PUNCTUATED BY THE UNFAMILIAR SOUNDS OF AN INVISIBLE AND MENACING FAUNA.

THE TWO MEN IMMEDIATELY CLIMB DOWN FROM THEIR PERCH, FINDING THE GROUND DEVOID OF SNAKES.

RESUMING THEIR MARCH, THEY BEGIN LOOKING FOR THE 'DOMAIN OF THE BLACK-EYED WHITE GODS' THAT SHAO'S TEXT GAVE AS THE NEXT STAGE.

Look, Mr Chou! We're leaving the Forest of Stone!

The Lords of the Heavens are with us!

Over there, in the distance ... The Red Mountain! This must be it, then. That plain must be the Domain of the Black-eyed White Gods ...

Better be on our guard. This place looks too idyllic by half.

Where can those strange gods be, anyway?

THE TWO MEN HAVE ALREADY REACHED THE MIDDLE OF THE BAMBOO FIELD WHEN SHARP, SNAPPING SOUNDS SUDDENLY SURROUND THEM.

KRR... Oh! KRRRAK KRRRAK ?

Look! That shape rising over there ...

KRRRAK

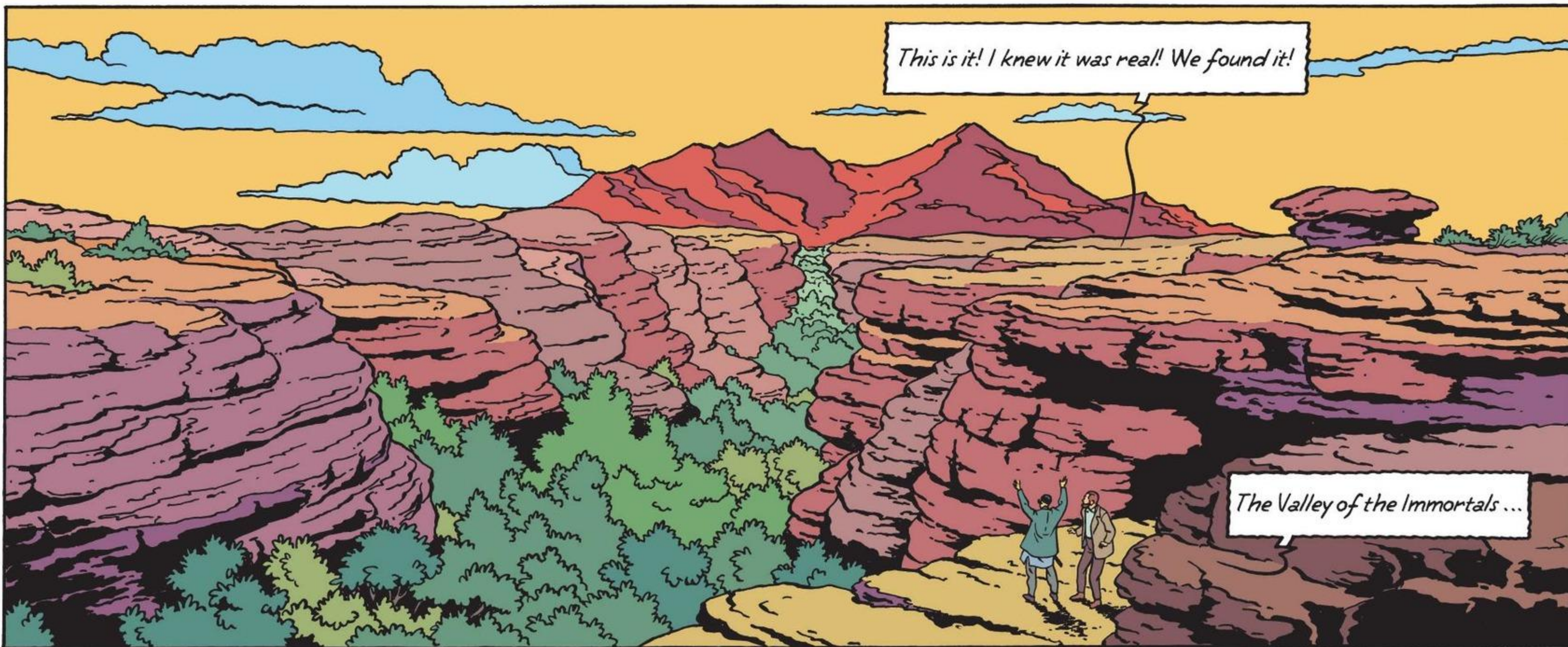
BEFORE THE TWO STUNNED, TRANSFIXED MEN, A GIANT PANDA REARS UP. A MIGHTY ROAR ...

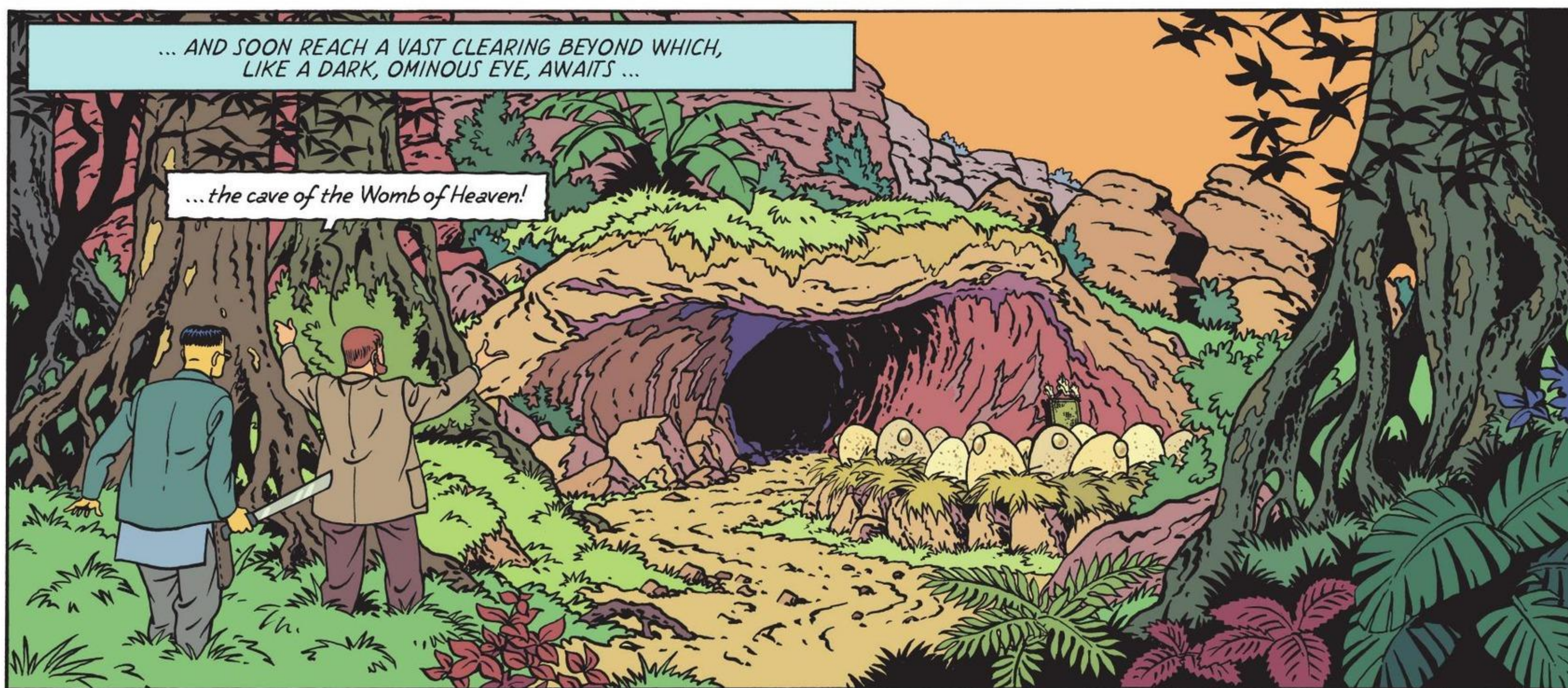
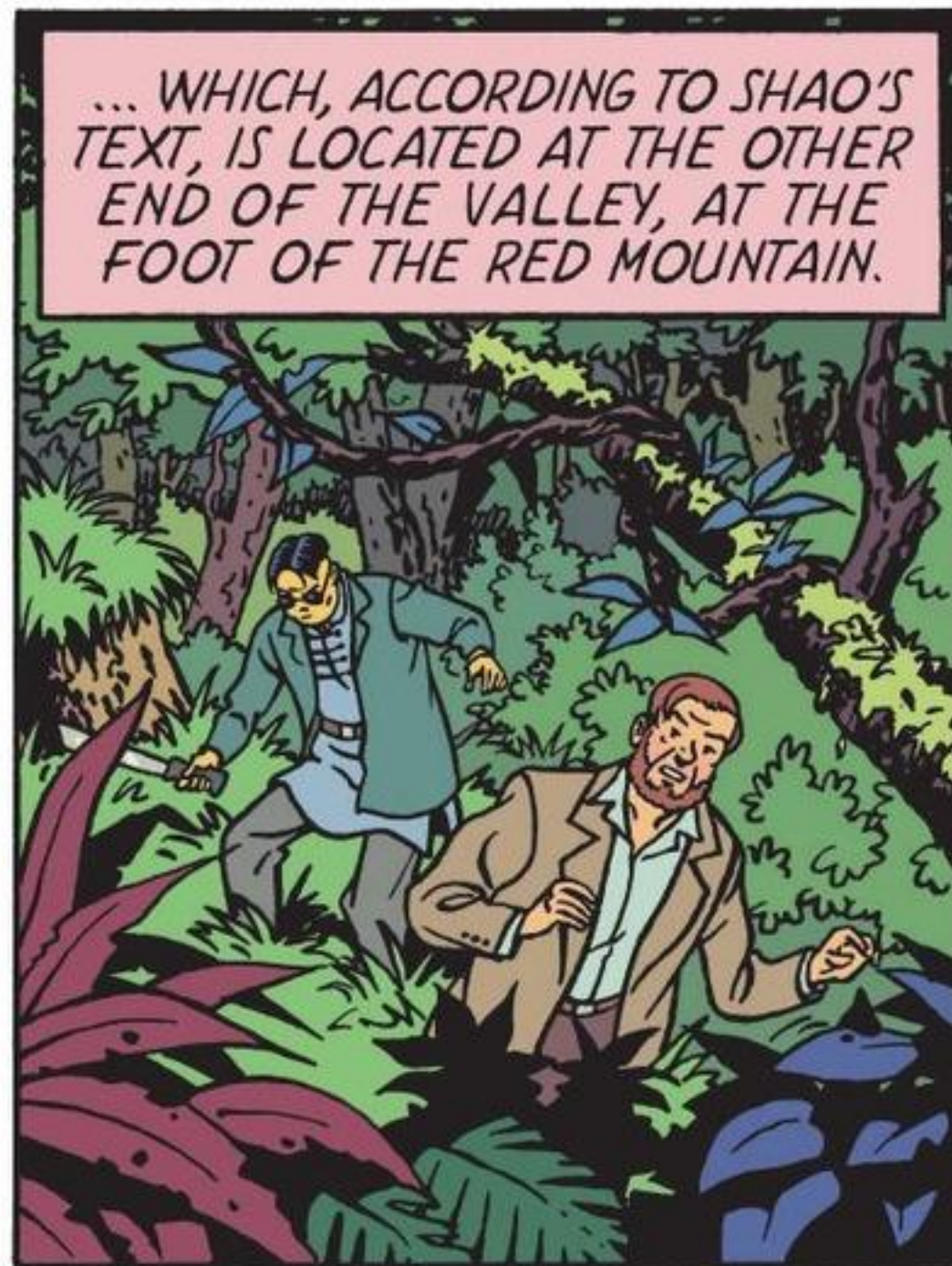
GRROARR

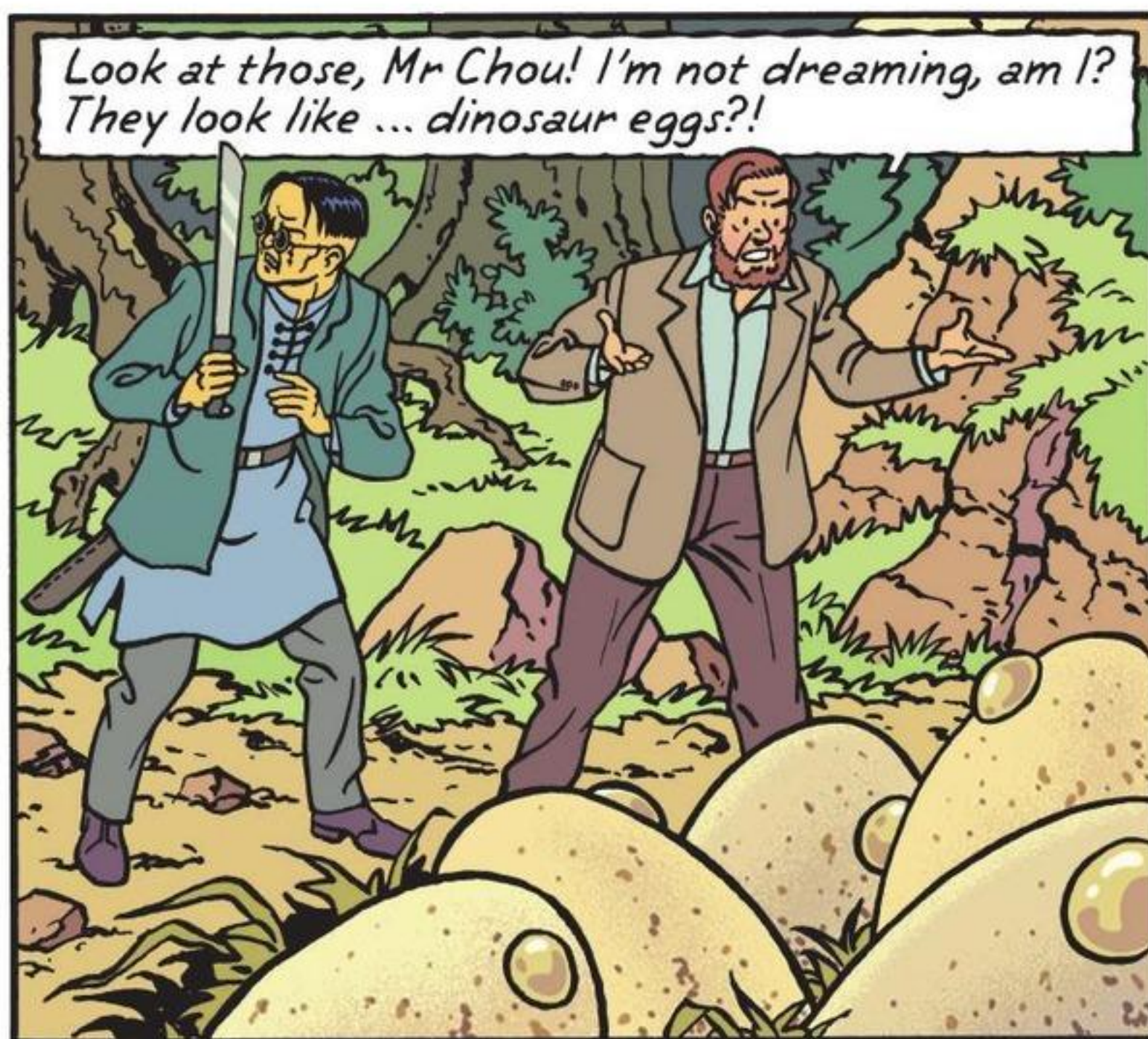
ROOOAAAR

Run!

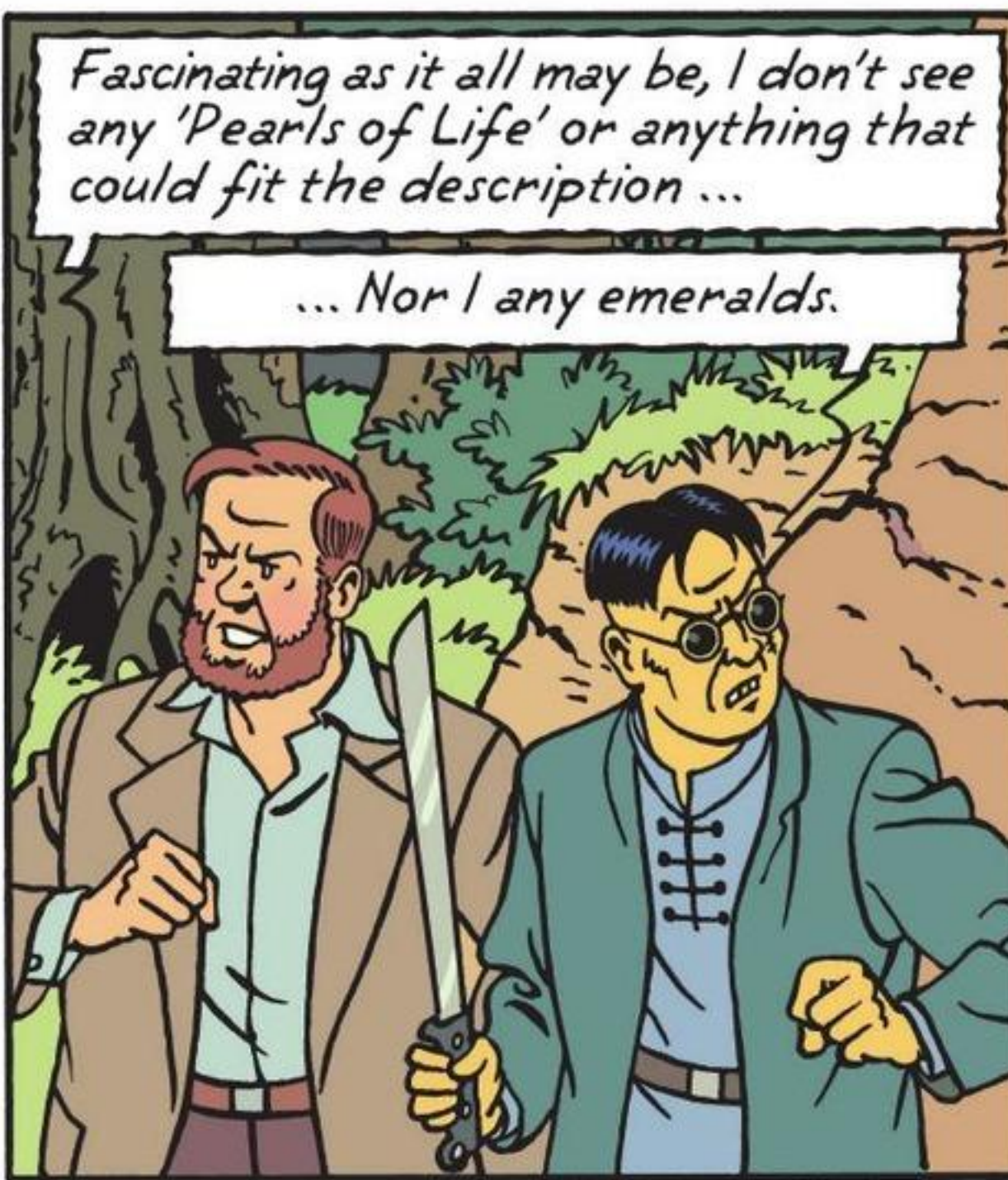
... SEEMS TO BE THE SIGNAL HIS FELLOWS WERE WAITING FOR TO ATTACK.





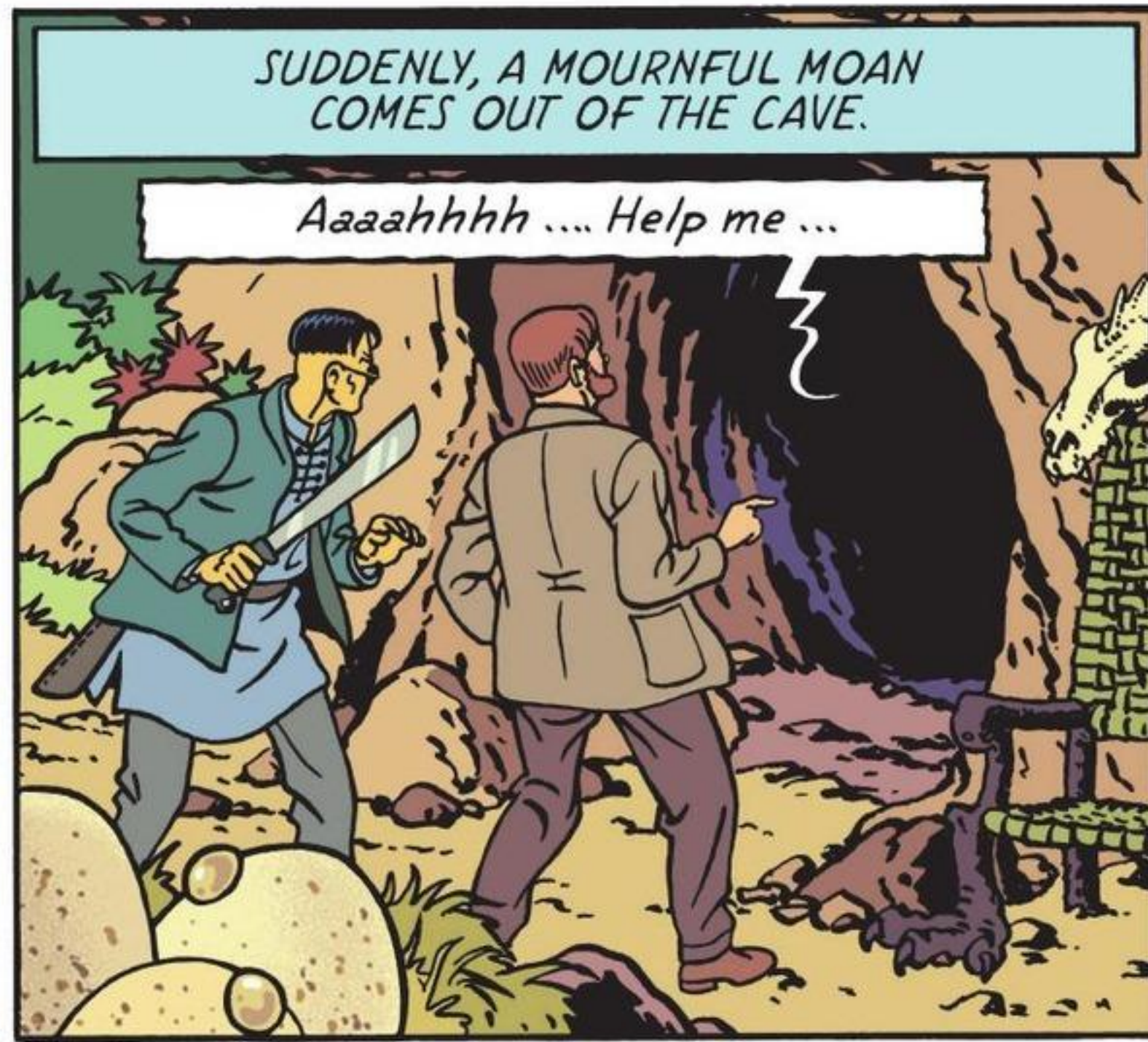


Look at those, Mr Chou! I'm not dreaming, am I? They look like ... dinosaur eggs?!



Fascinating as it all may be, I don't see any 'Pearls of Life' or anything that could fit the description ...

... Nor I any emeralds.



SUDDENLY, A MOURNFUL MOAN COMES OUT OF THE CAVE.

Aaaahhhh ... Help me ...



Help me ... Please, please ...

By Jove! There's someone in there, in the shadows ...

... apparently begging for our help.

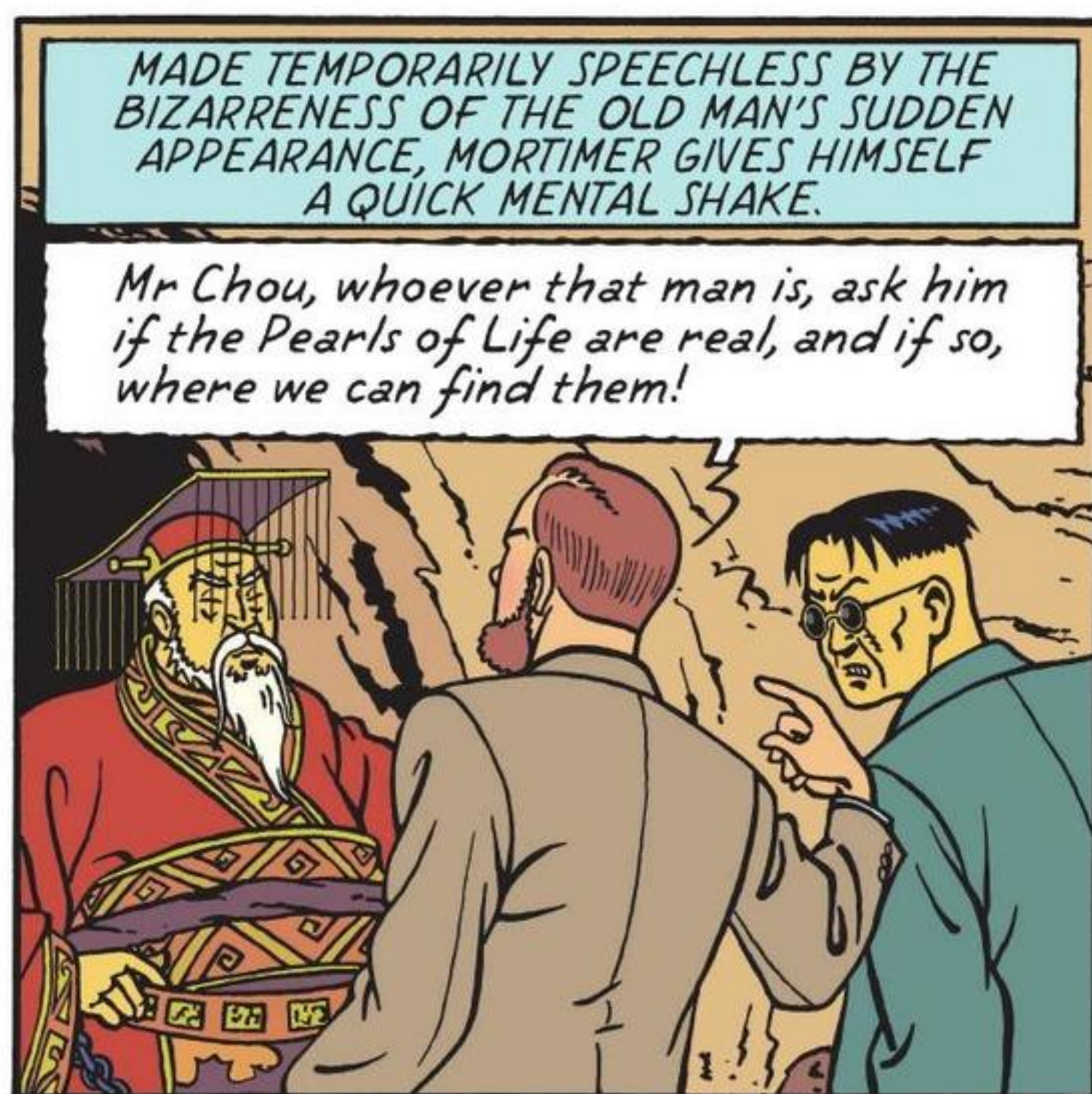


Free me ... Tell Li Ssu ... Tell my chance!

Who's there? Who are you?

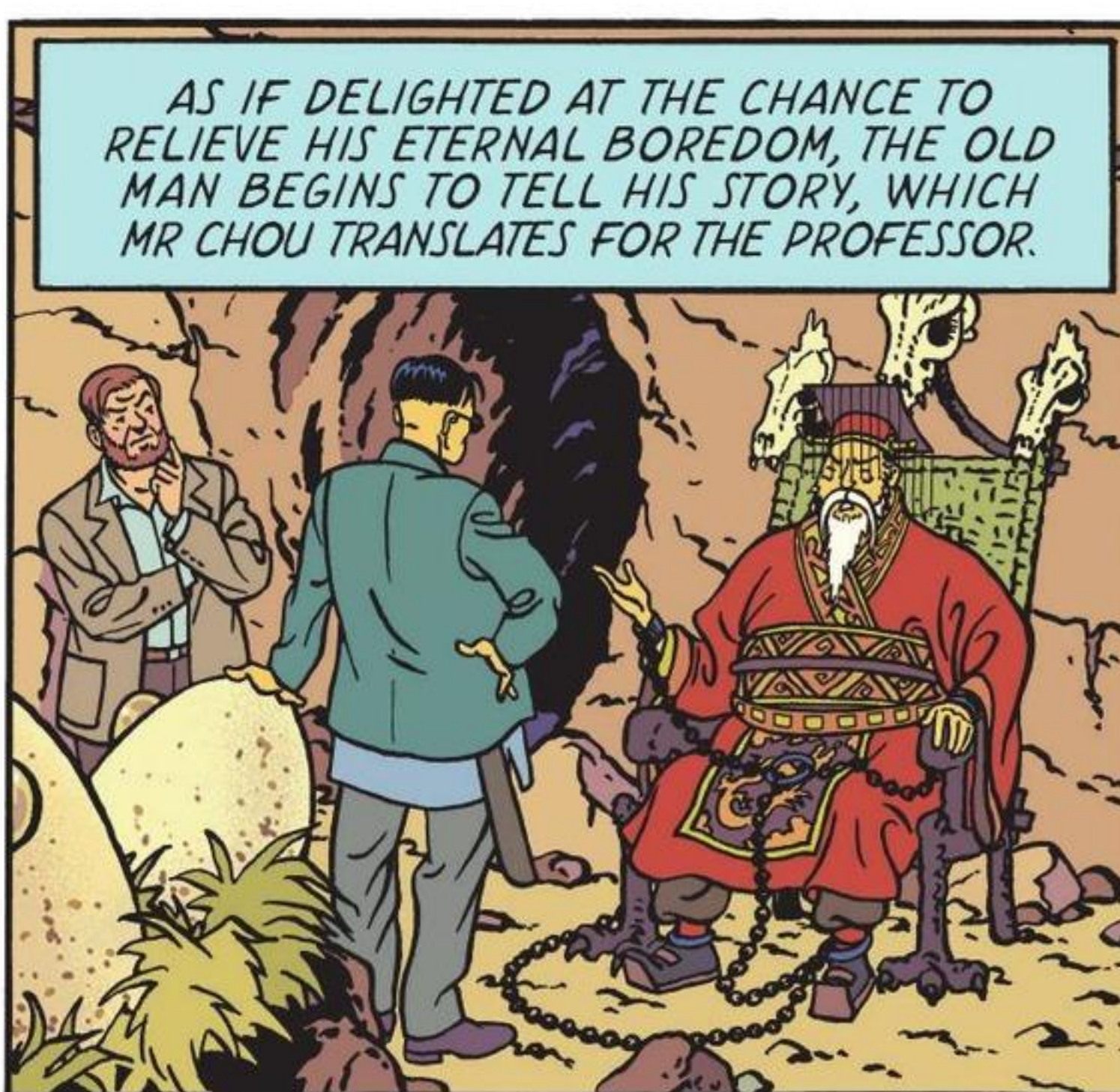


Who am I? But ... I am your emperor! I am ... Shih-huang-ti!

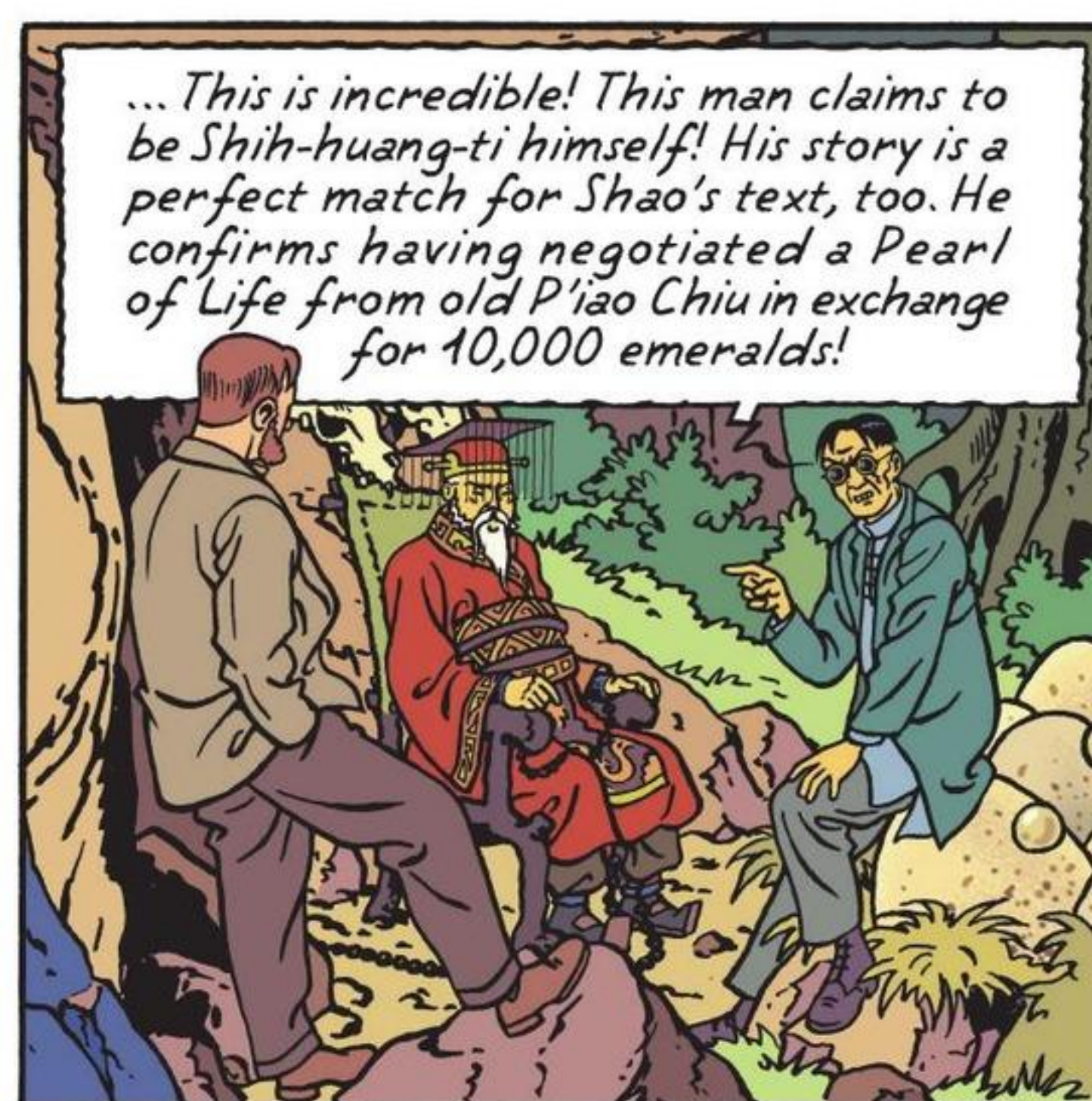


MADE TEMPORARILY SPEECHLESS BY THE BIZARRENESSE OF THE OLD MAN'S SUDDEN APPEARANCE, MORTIMER GIVES HIMSELF A QUICK MENTAL SHAKE.

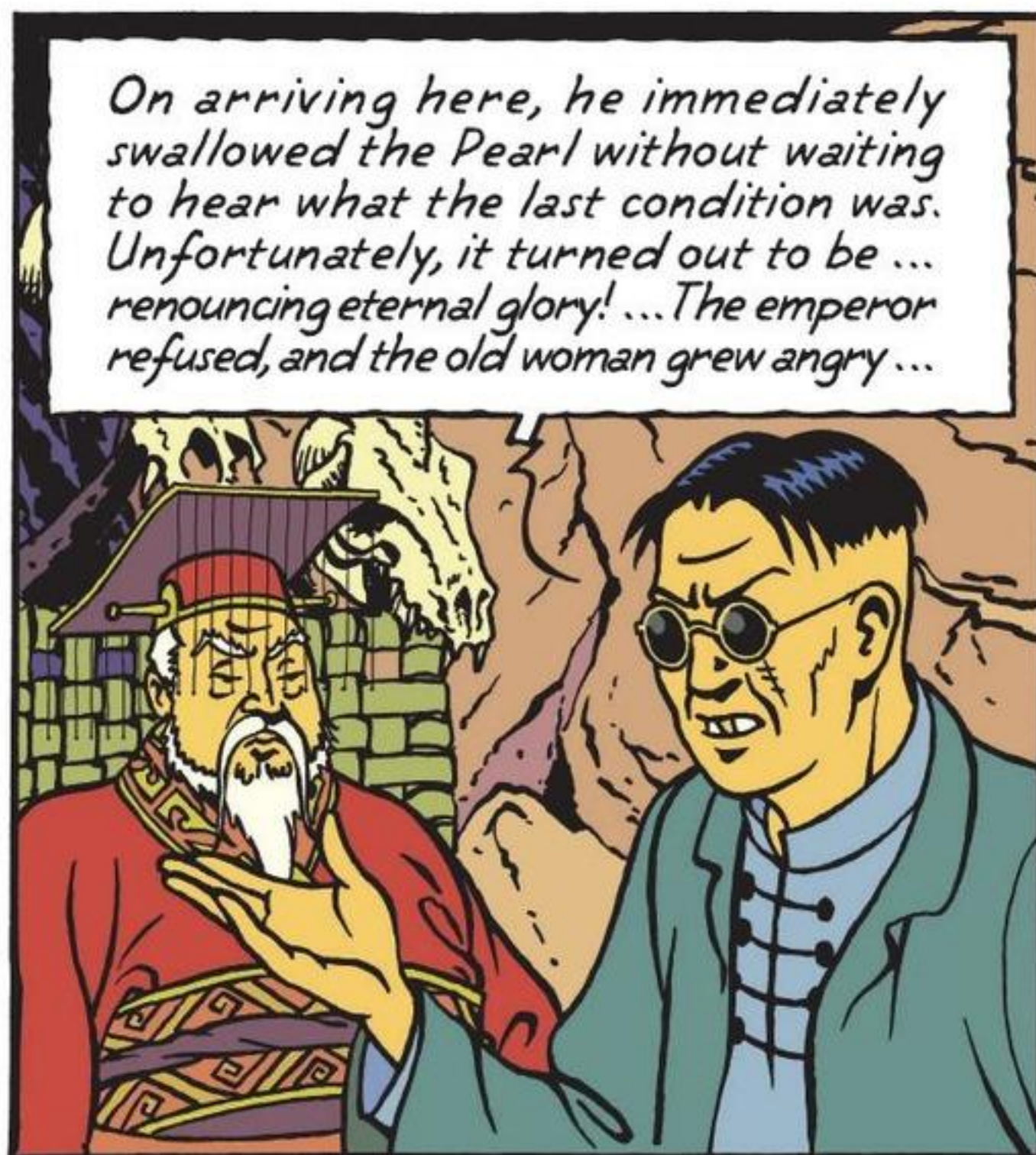
Mr Chou, whoever that man is, ask him if the Pearls of Life are real, and if so, where we can find them!



AS IF DELIGHTED AT THE CHANCE TO RELIEVE HIS ETERNAL BOREDOM, THE OLD MAN BEGINS TO TELL HIS STORY, WHICH MR CHOU TRANSLATES FOR THE PROFESSOR.



... This is incredible! This man claims to be Shih-huang-ti himself! His story is a perfect match for Shao's text, too. He confirms having negotiated a Pearl of Life from old P'iao Chiu in exchange for 10,000 emeralds!

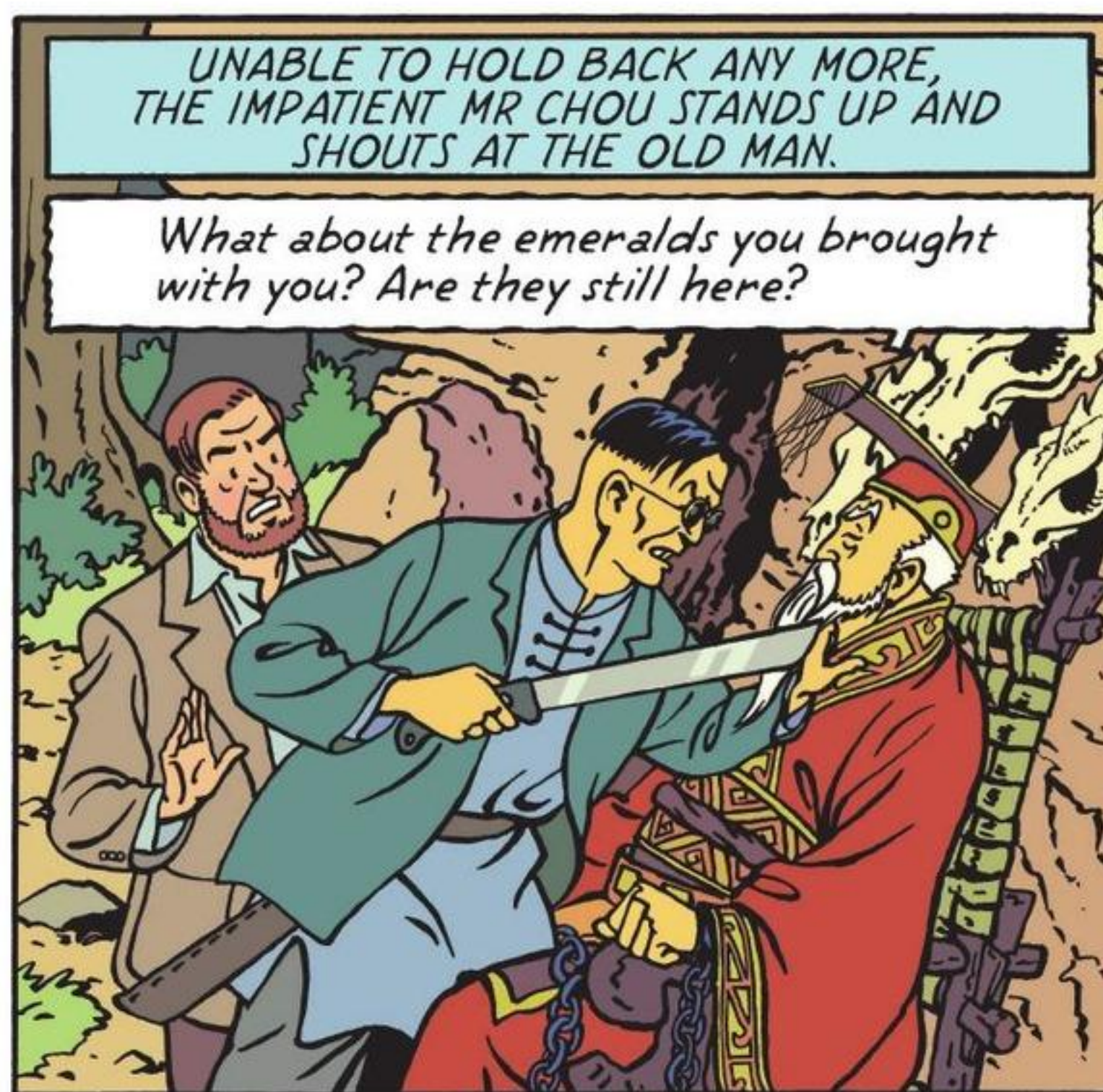


On arriving here, he immediately swallowed the Pearl without waiting to hear what the last condition was. Unfortunately, it turned out to be ... renouncing eternal glory! ... The emperor refused, and the old woman grew angry ...



...and had him chained to this cave where he is guarded by the Immortals. Since then he's been 'dying of boredom', yet doomed to eternal life ...

Astonishing! Could it be? Could that man really be ... ?



UNABLE TO HOLD BACK ANY MORE, THE IMPATIENT MR CHOU STANDS UP AND SHOUTS AT THE OLD MAN.

What about the emeralds you brought with you? Are they still here?

WITHOUT A WORD, THE EMPEROR RISES AND WALKS TOWARDS THE BACK OF THE CAVE.



He's going to get them! Do you understand?! I was right! It isn't just a legend!



Watch it, Mr Chou. A fortune teller back at Li Hsi's camp told me we 'shouldn't seek anything for ourselves' ... Ask him where the Pearls of Life are!

The emeralds! Look at that! Thousands of them! I'm rich!



You can look at the gems, but don't touch them. The sound might—

Rich! Rich! Riiiiich!

Believe me. You mustn't take even a single one of these emeralds. They are the young dragons' primary food.



EEEEAAARRRRHHH!

What was that horrible screech?!



Good heavens! An egg hatched!



BEFORE THE VERY EYES OF THE DUMBFOUNDED MORTIMER AND MR CHOU, THE REST OF THE CLUTCH BEGINS TO SHAKE AND CRACK. ALREADY, THE FIRST HATCHLING HAS STARTED WORRYING AT THE DOME THAT TOPS HIS EGG ...



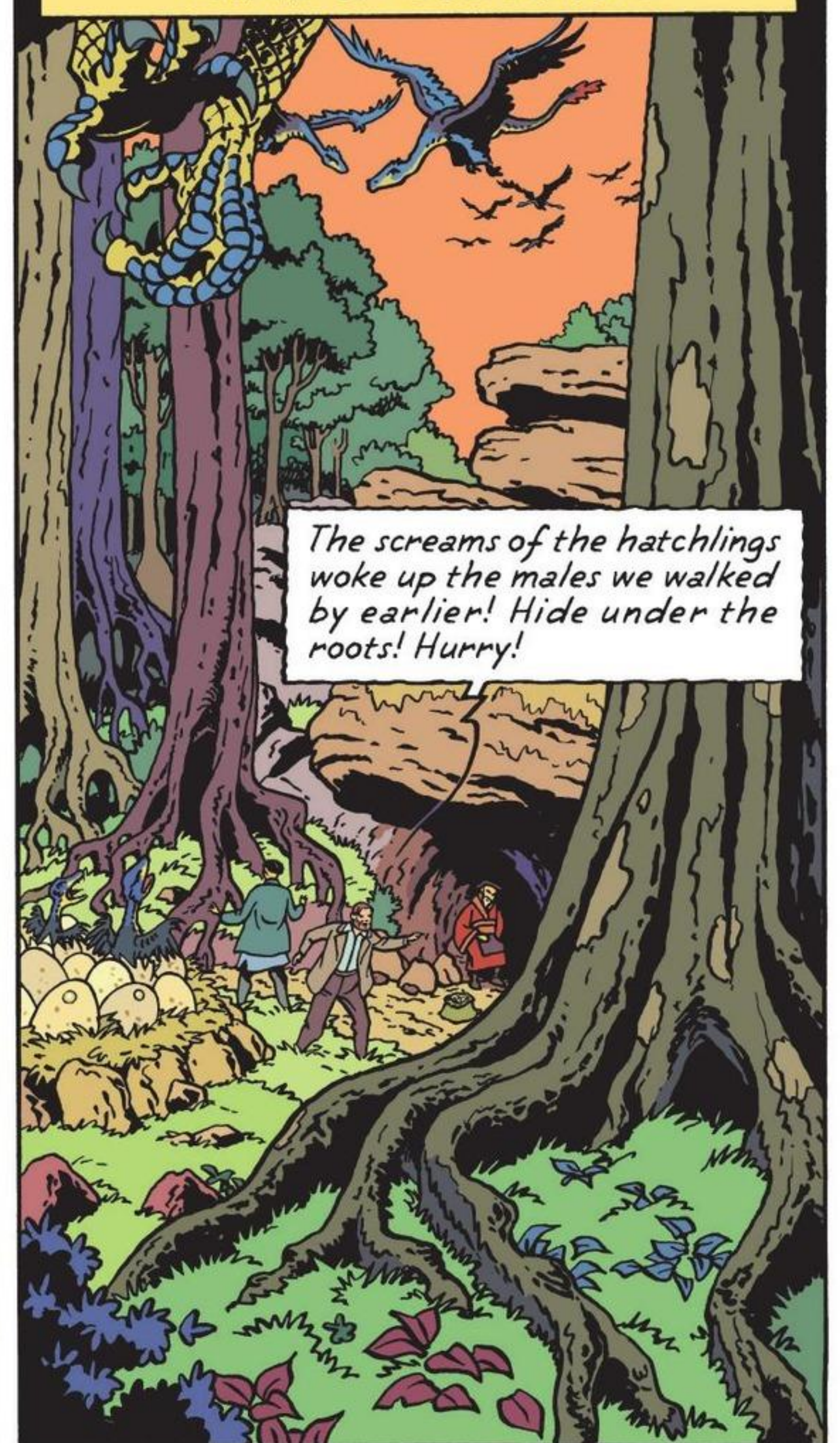
... TO SNATCH THE PEARL OF LIFE THAT NATURE PROVIDED HIM ...



... AND GOBBLE IT WHOLE.



... FOLLOWED BY THE APPEARANCE OF A SWARM OF ADULT DRAGONS.



The screams of the hatchlings woke up the males we walked by earlier! Hide under the roots! Hurry!

Blast it! If all of those little monsters swallow their pearls at birth, I won't have one to bring back to Nasir!

Are you mad?! Surely you're not—



BUT BOTH MEN'S WORDS ARE INTERRUPTED BY A GROWING THUNDER OF WINGS ...





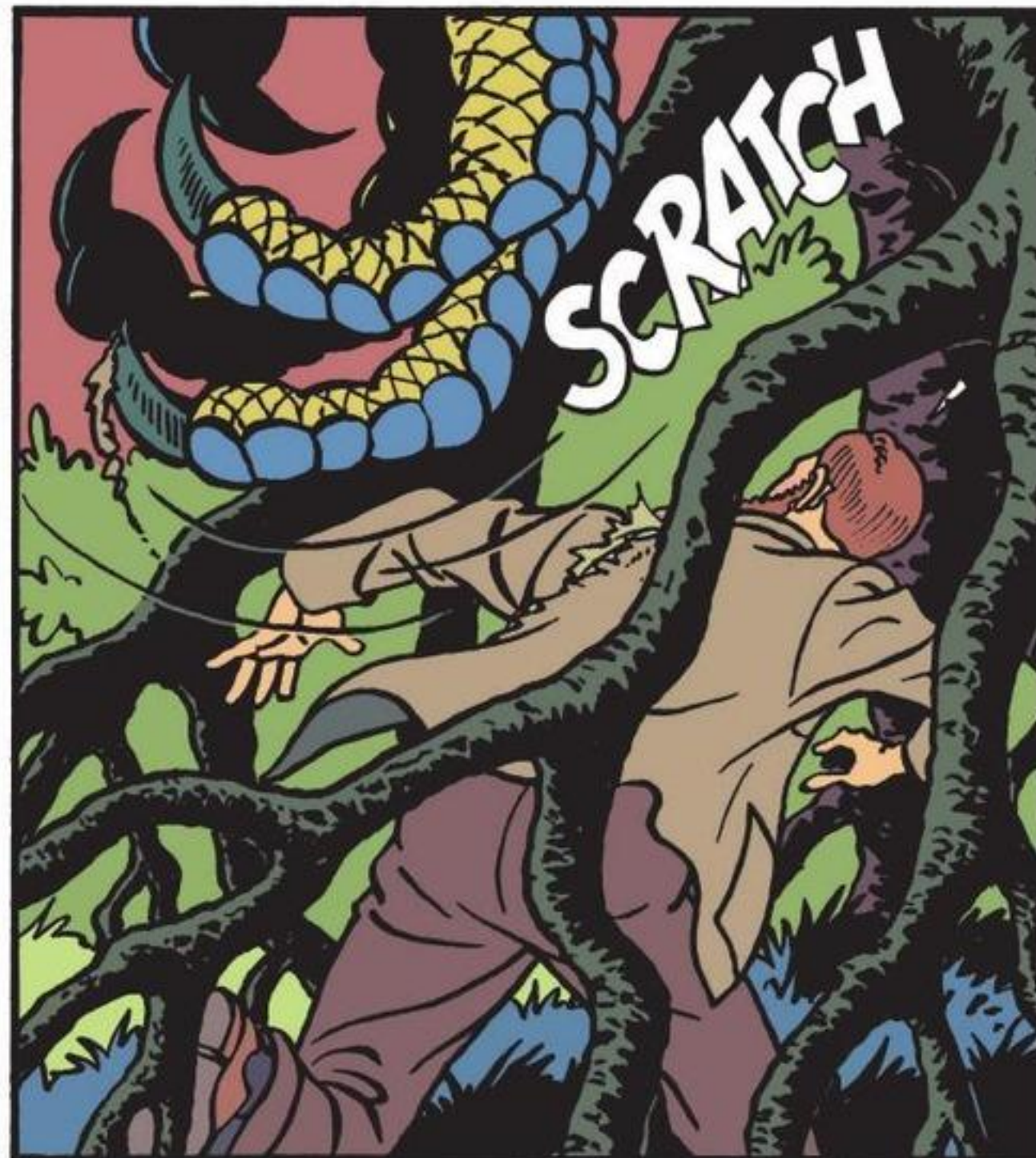
From this point on, Professor,
it's every man for himself!

FLAPPA
FLAP

FLAP



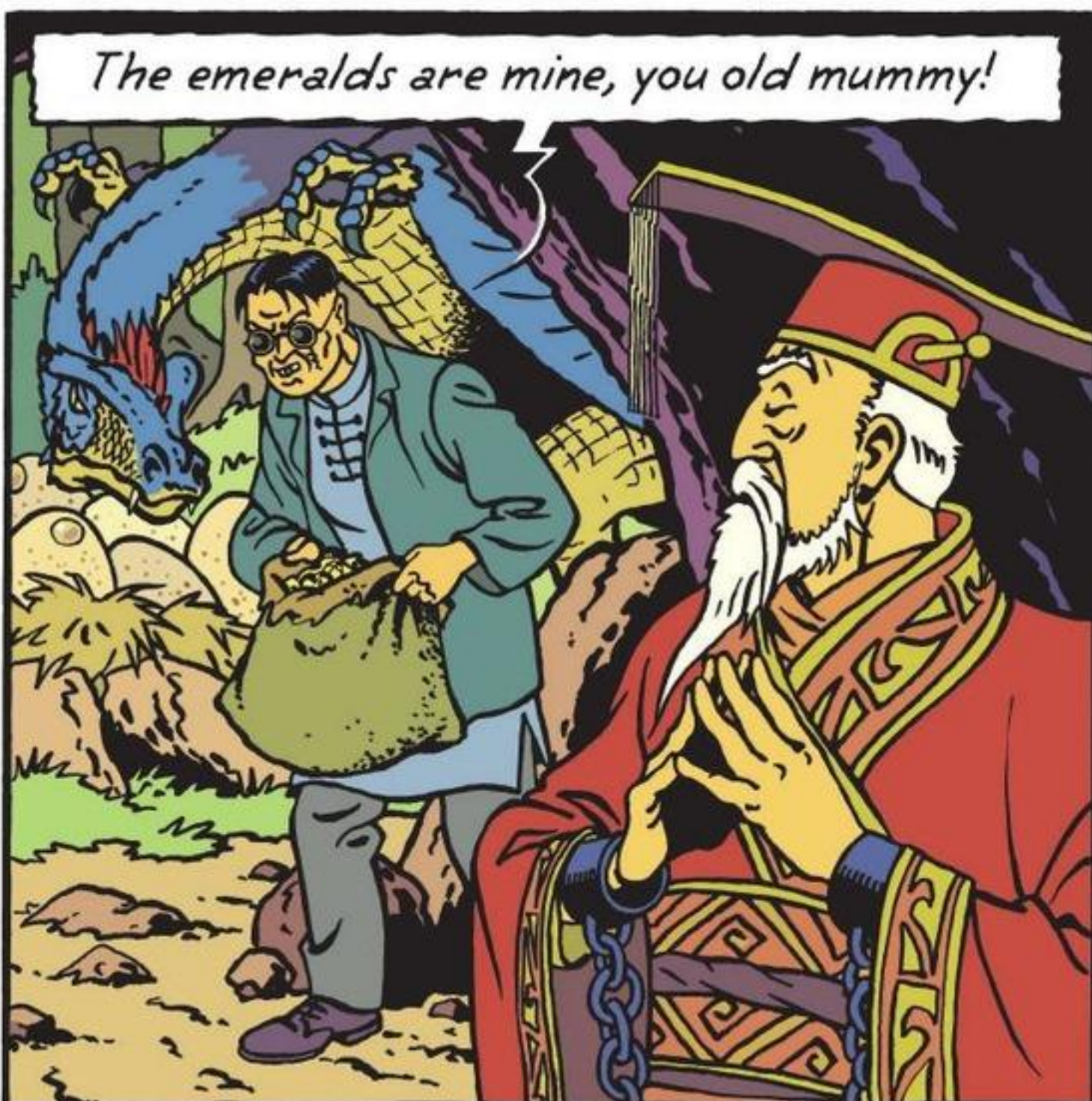
!



SCRATCH



No, wait! No! Don't do it, Chou! ...



The emeralds are mine, you old mummy!



Ha! Ha! Ha!



Mr Chou! No! Come
back! ... No-o-o-o!



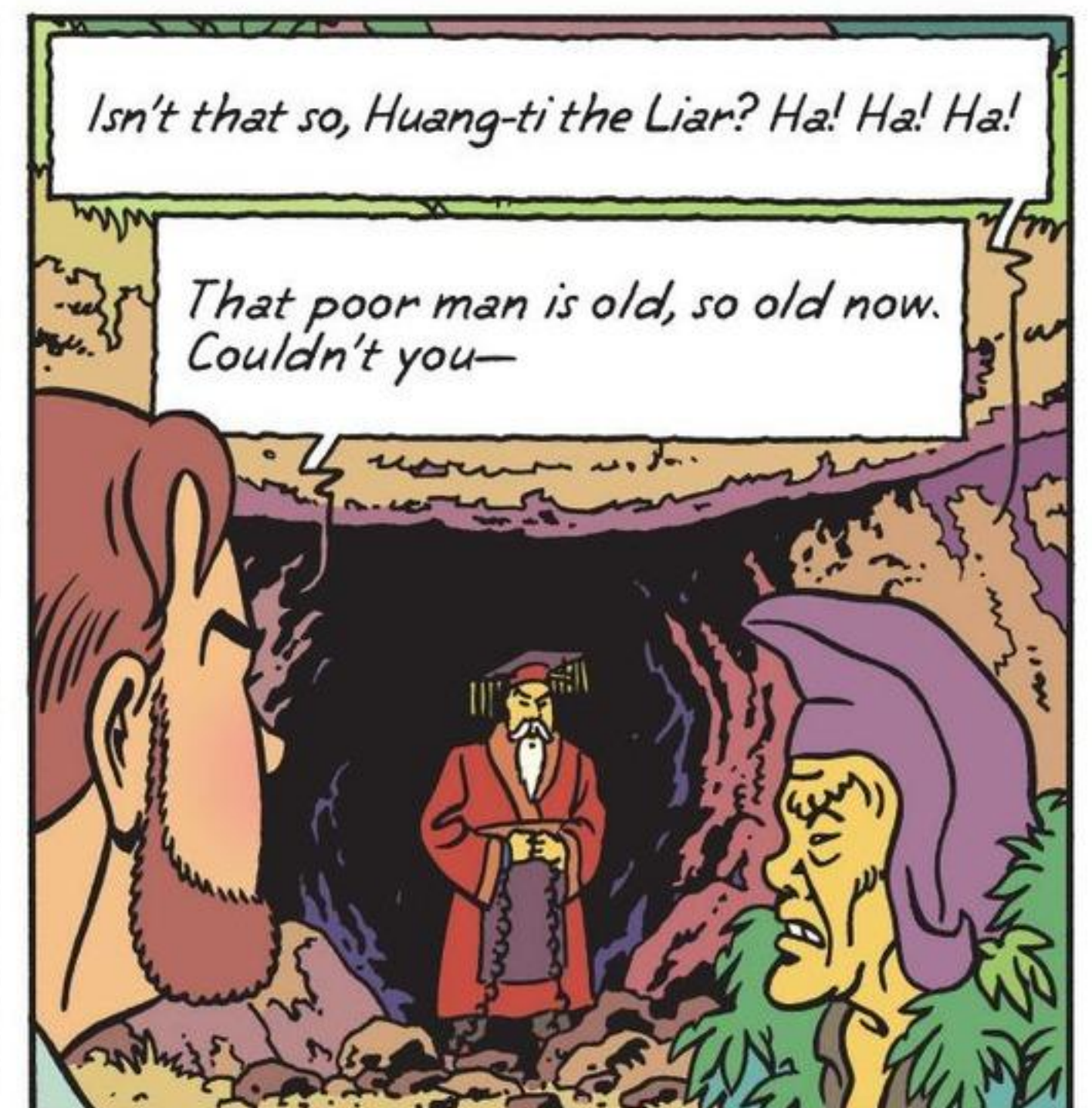
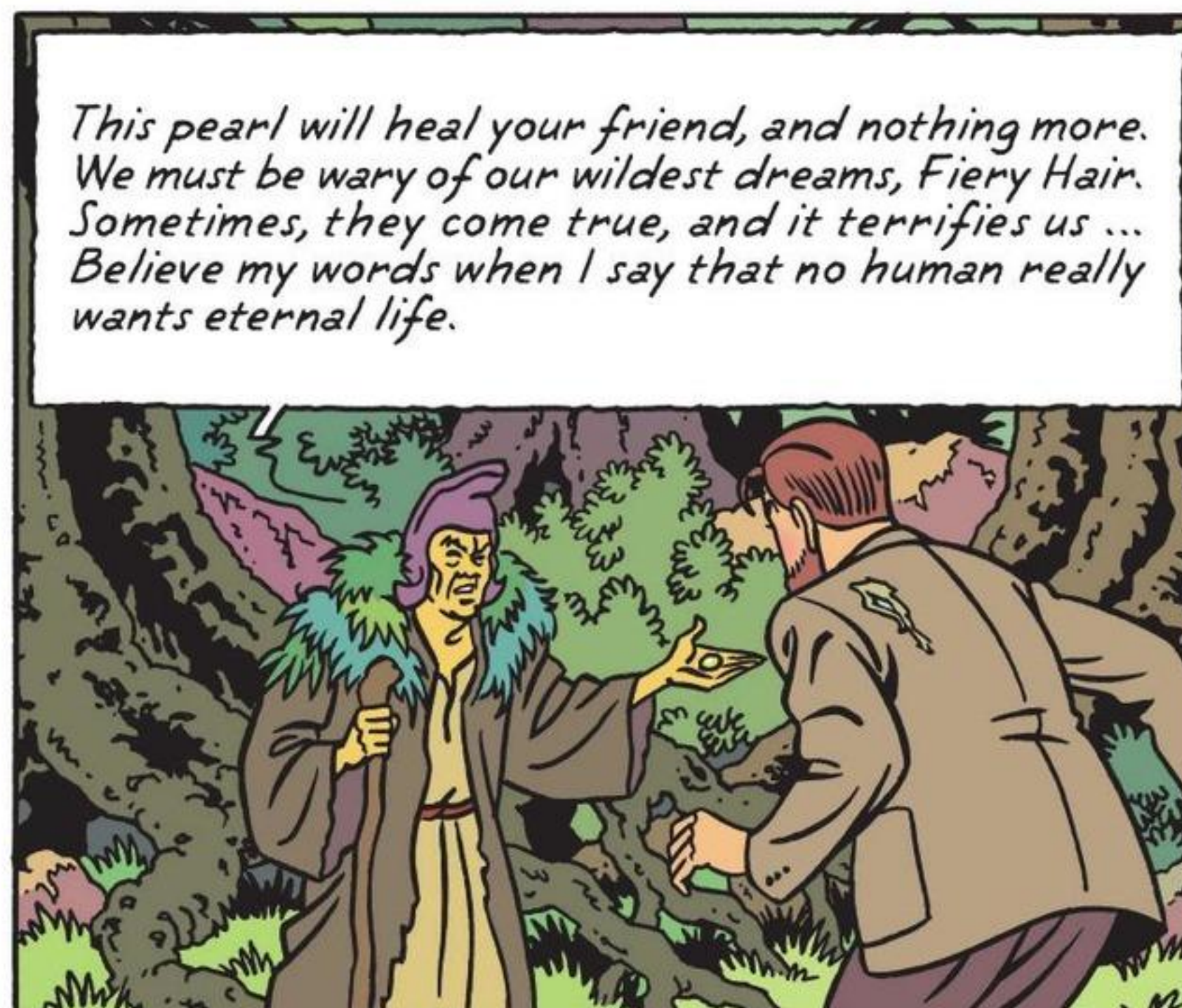
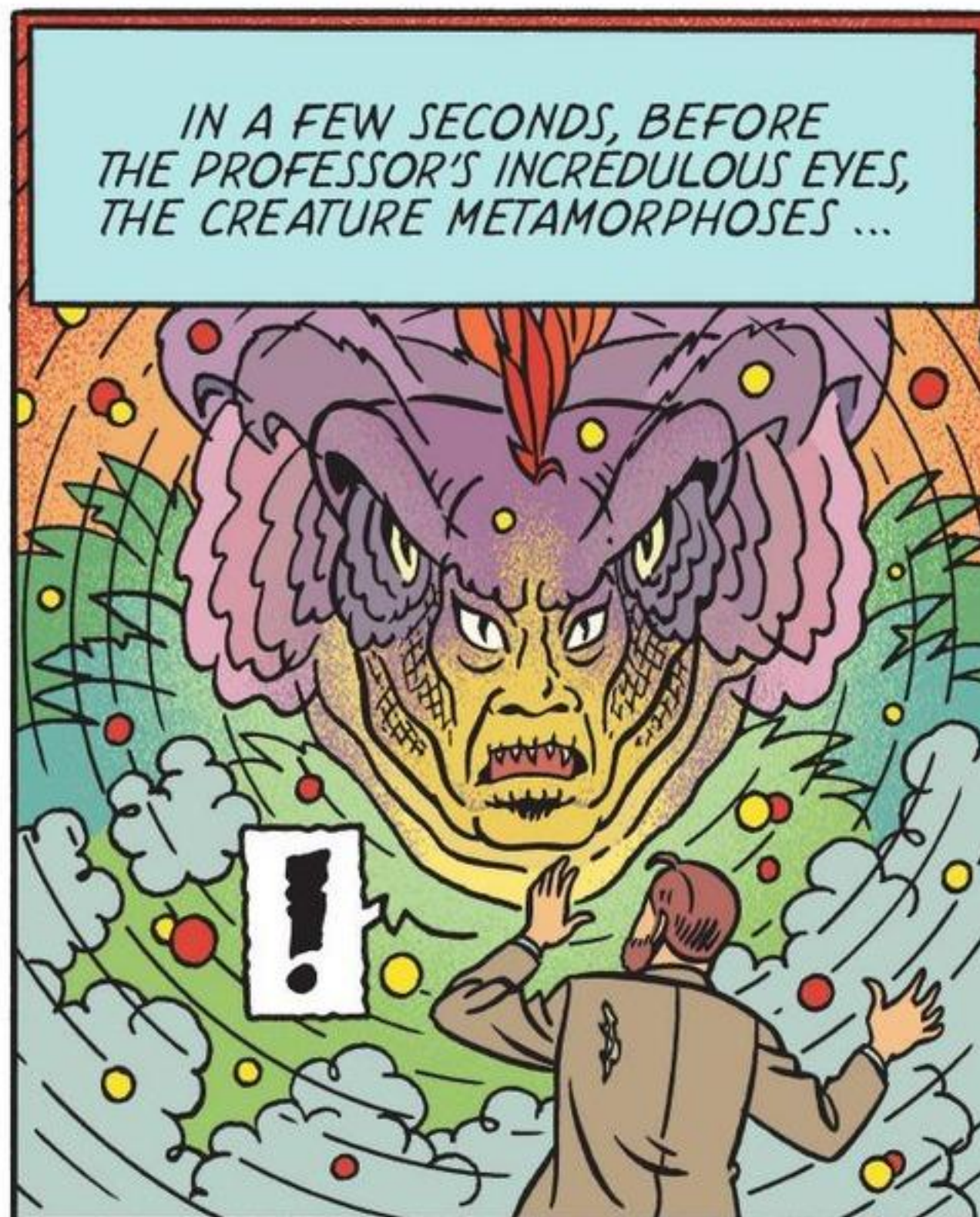
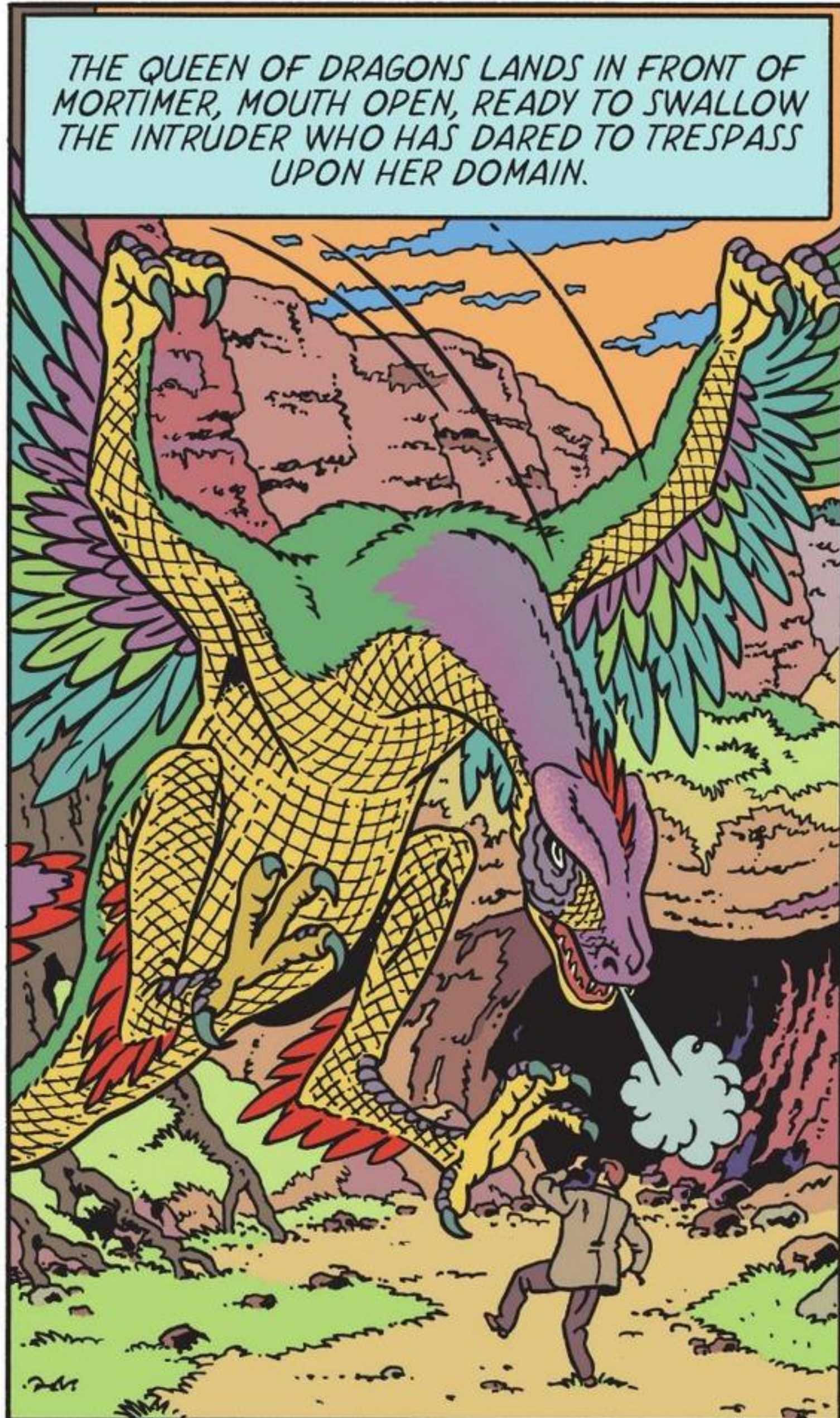
BRAVELY, THE PROFESSOR LEAPS
OUT, HOPING TO PREVENT THE
INEVITABLE TRAGEDY ...

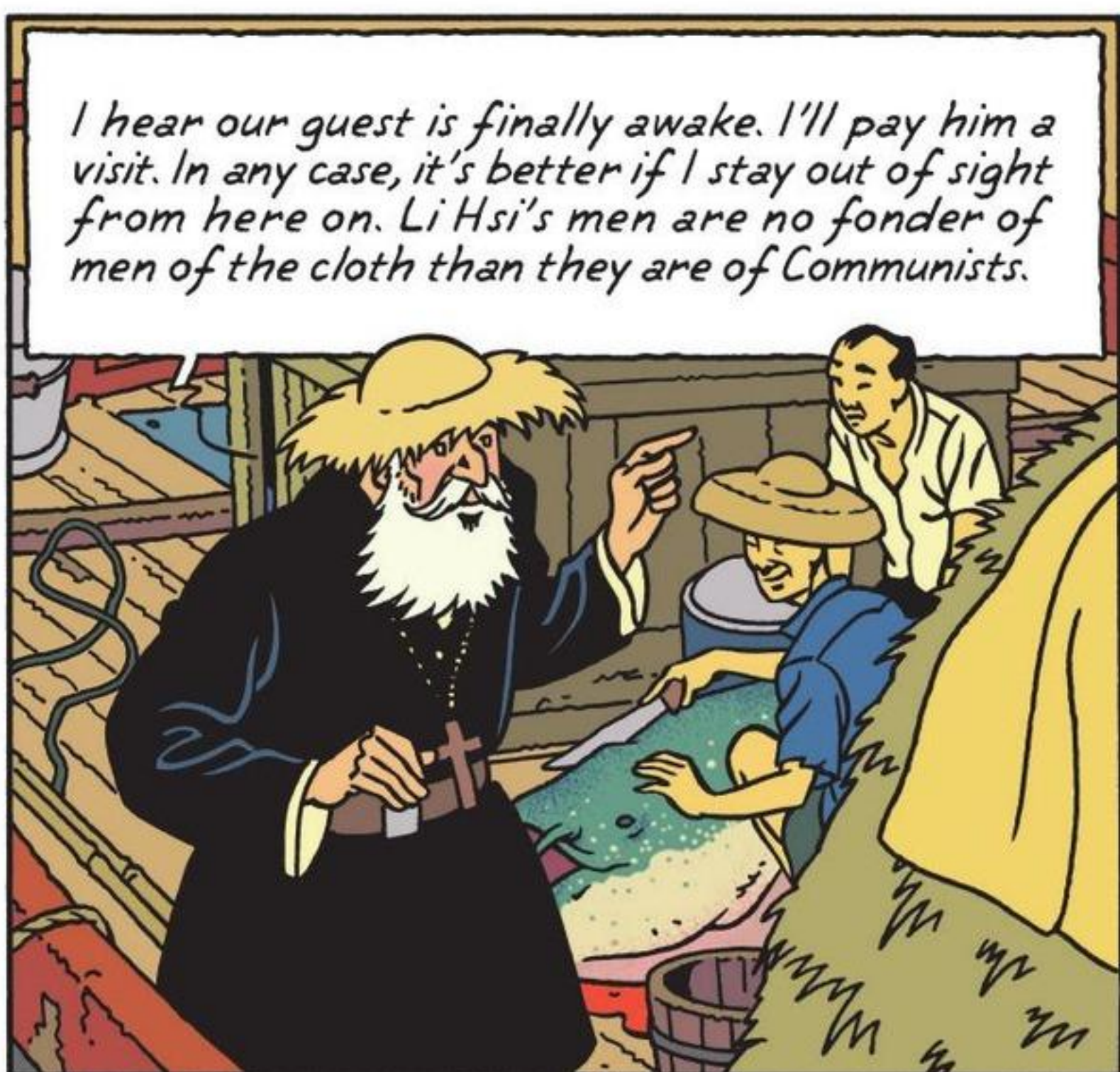
No! Help! Help!!
Aaaahh!



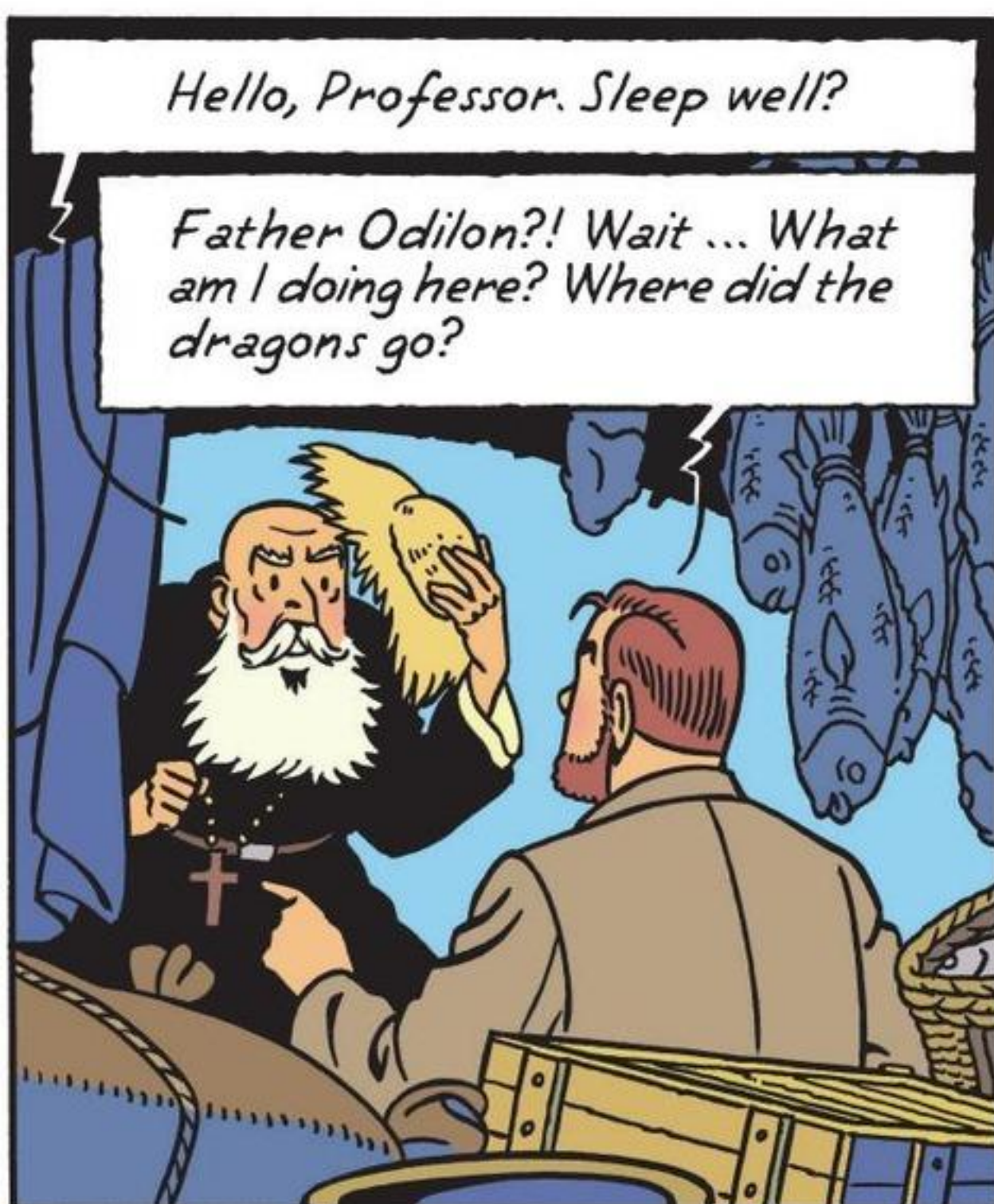
... WHEN
HE SUDDENLY
FREEZES,
REALISING THAT
A GIGANTIC
SHADOW IS
RUSHING AT
HIM.

FLAP FLAPPA FLAP



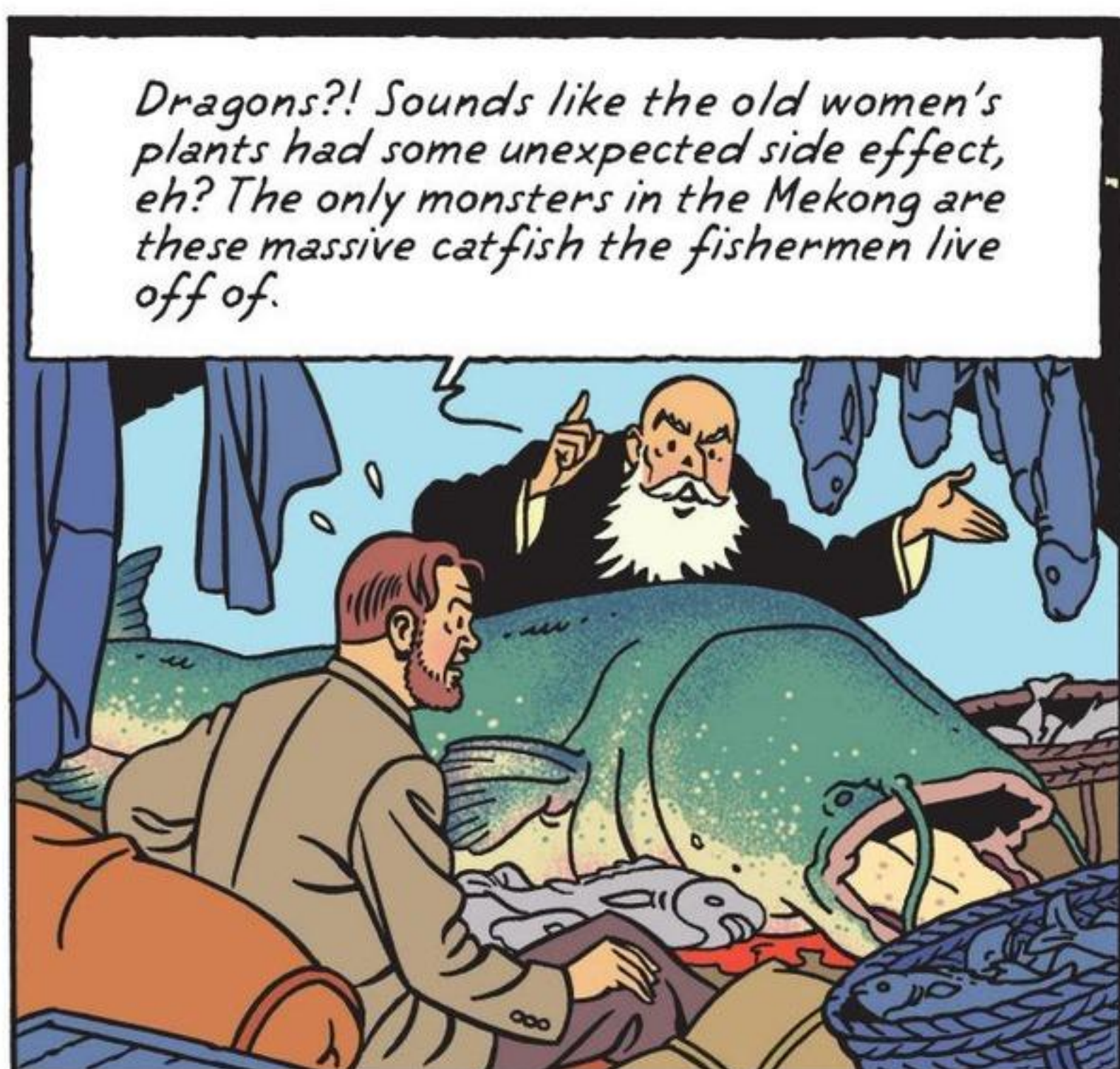


I hear our guest is finally awake. I'll pay him a visit. In any case, it's better if I stay out of sight from here on. Li Hsi's men are no fonder of men of the cloth than they are of Communists.

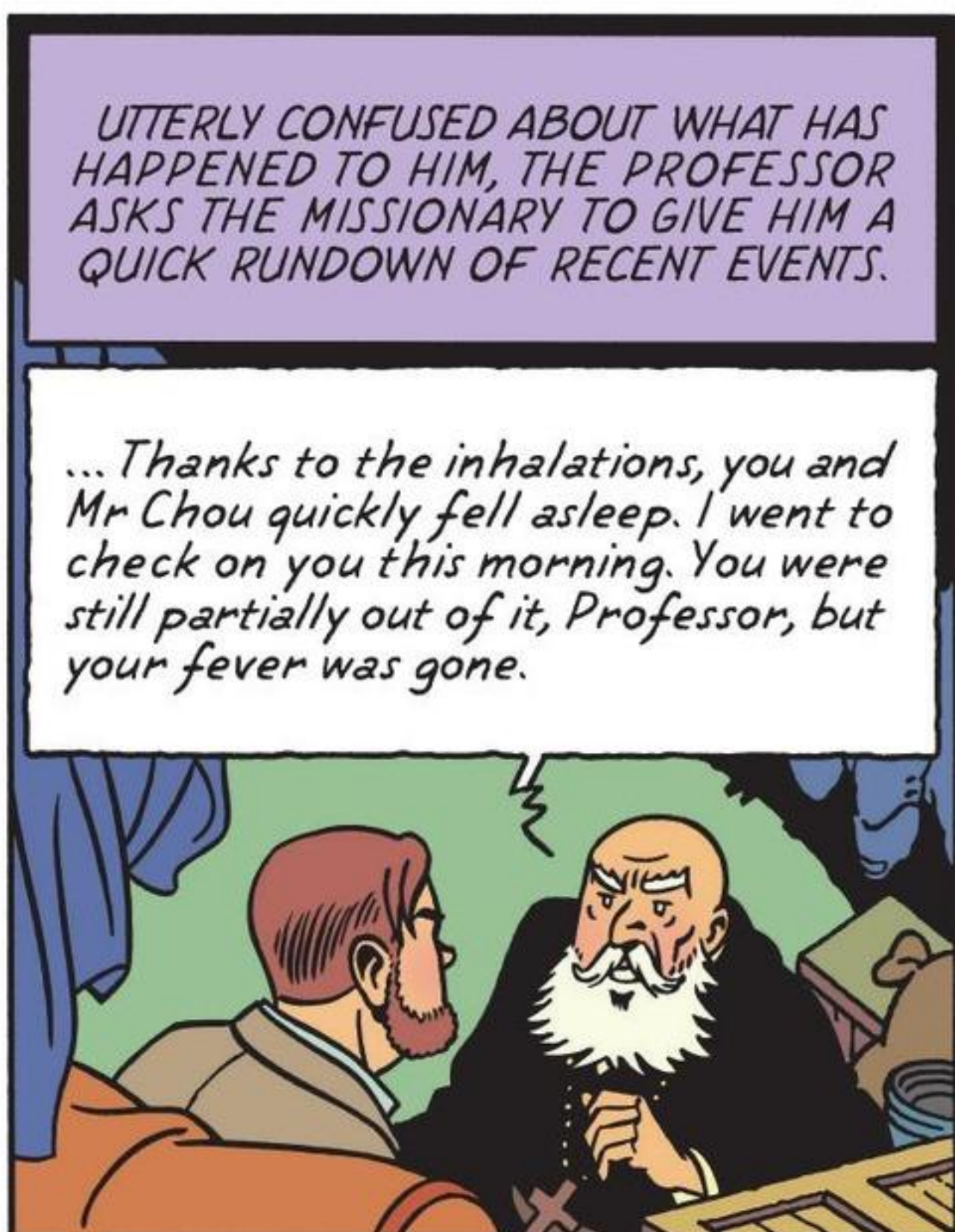


Hello, Professor. Sleep well?

Father Odilon?! Wait ... What am I doing here? Where did the dragons go?

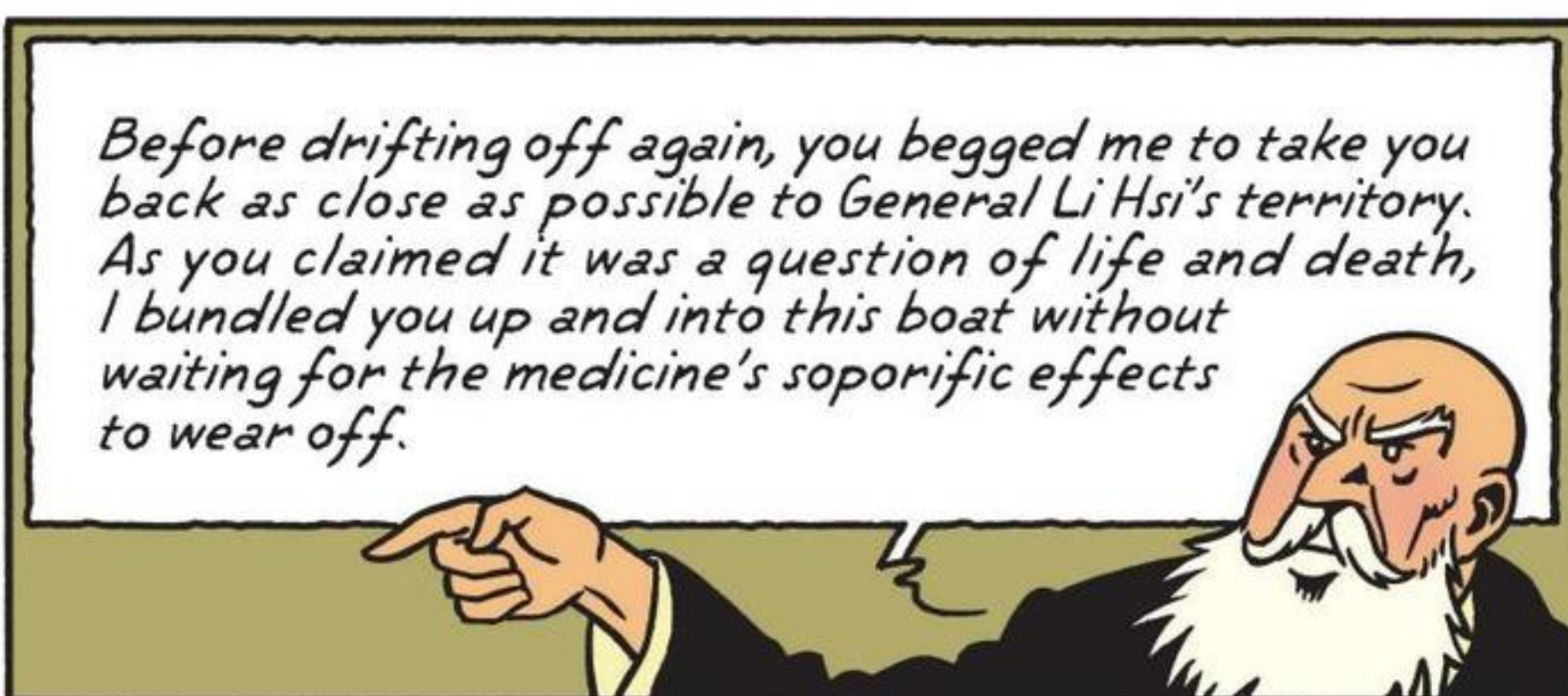


Dragons?! Sounds like the old women's plants had some unexpected side effect, eh? The only monsters in the Mekong are these massive catfish the fishermen live off of.

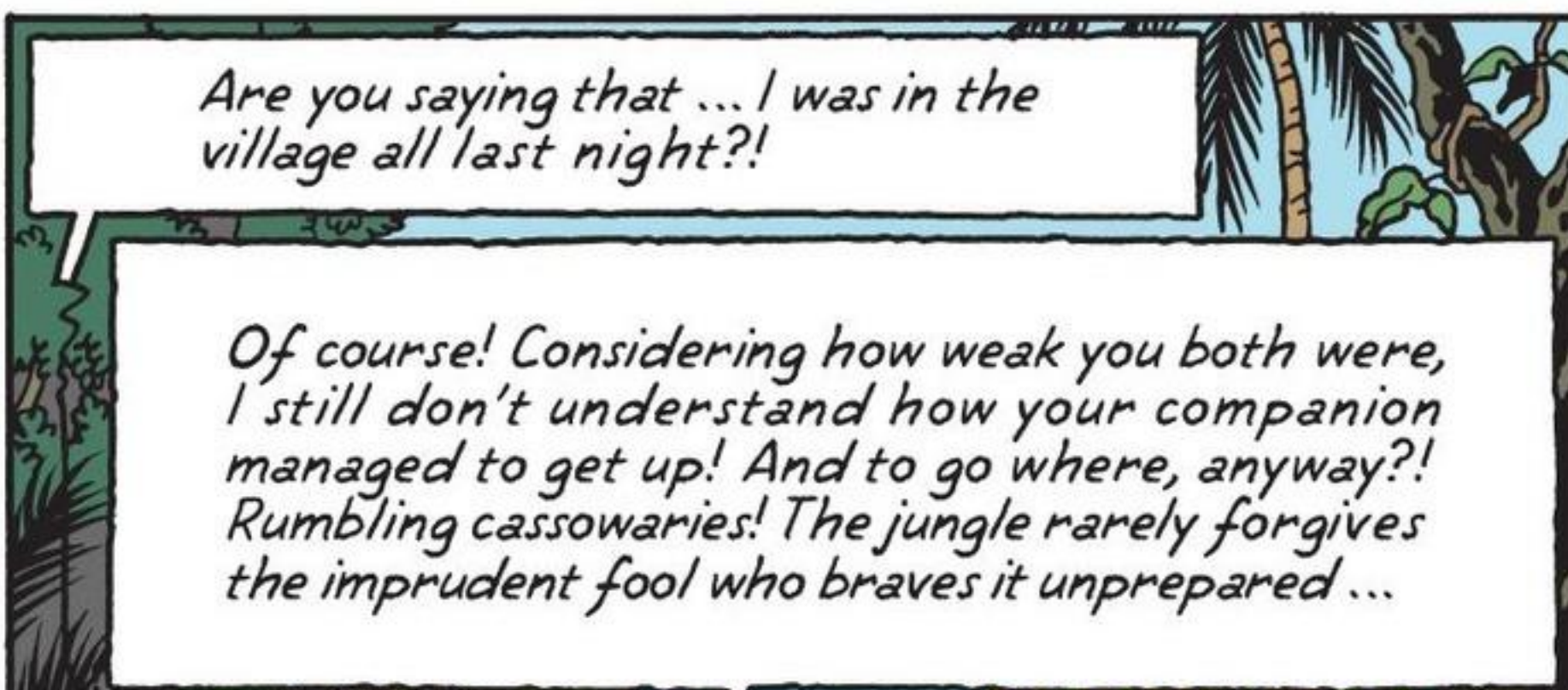


UTTERLY CONFUSED ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO HIM, THE PROFESSOR ASKS THE MISSIONARY TO GIVE HIM A QUICK RUNDOWN OF RECENT EVENTS.

... Thanks to the inhalations, you and Mr Chou quickly fell asleep. I went to check on you this morning. You were still partially out of it, Professor, but your fever was gone.



Before drifting off again, you begged me to take you back as close as possible to General Li Hsi's territory. As you claimed it was a question of life and death, I bundled you up and into this boat without waiting for the medicine's soporific effects to wear off.

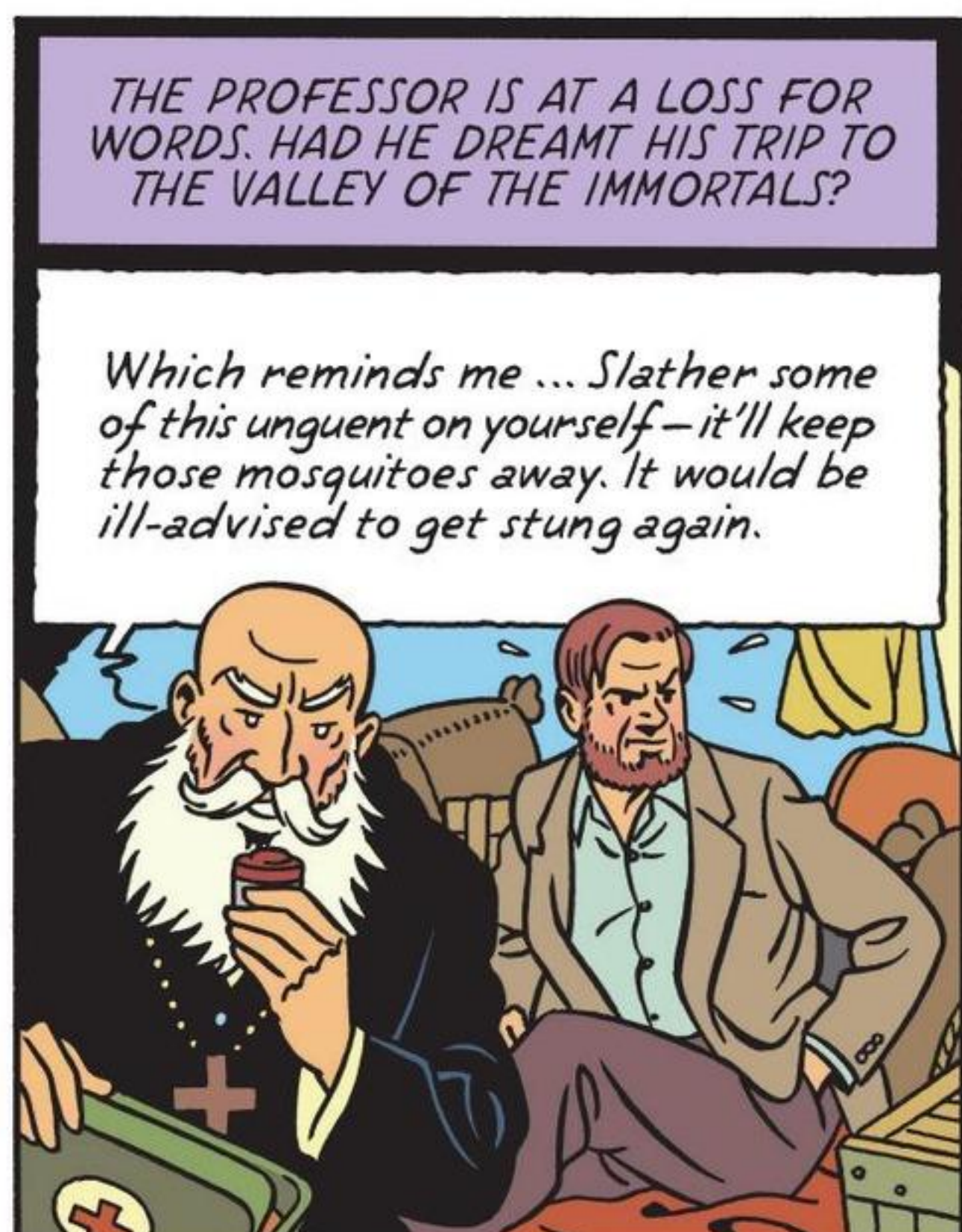


Are you saying that ... I was in the village all last night?!

Of course! Considering how weak you both were, I still don't understand how your companion managed to get up! And to go where, anyway?! Rumbling cassowaries! The jungle rarely forgives the imprudent fool who braves it unprepared ...



So, by the way, was Mr Chou ...

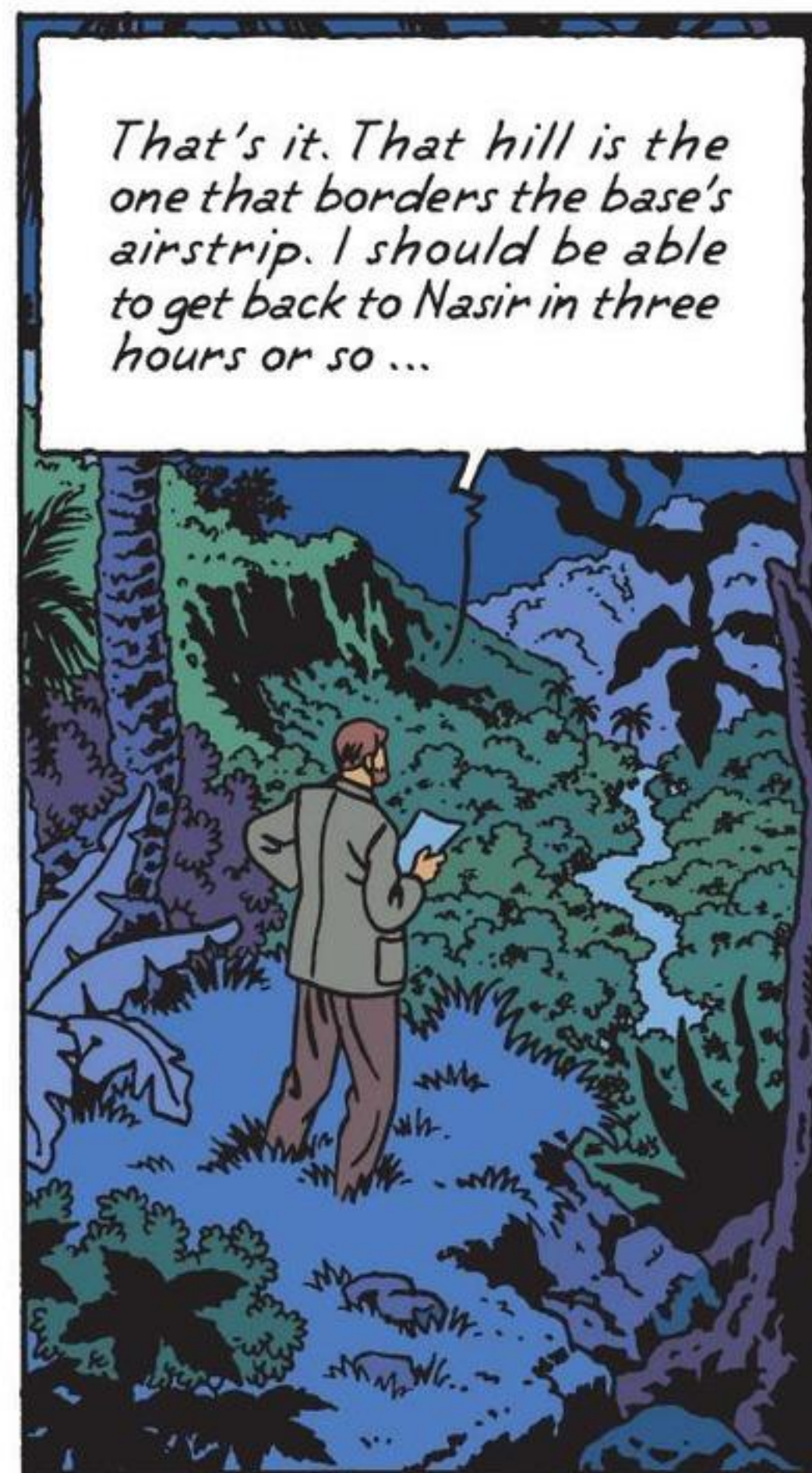
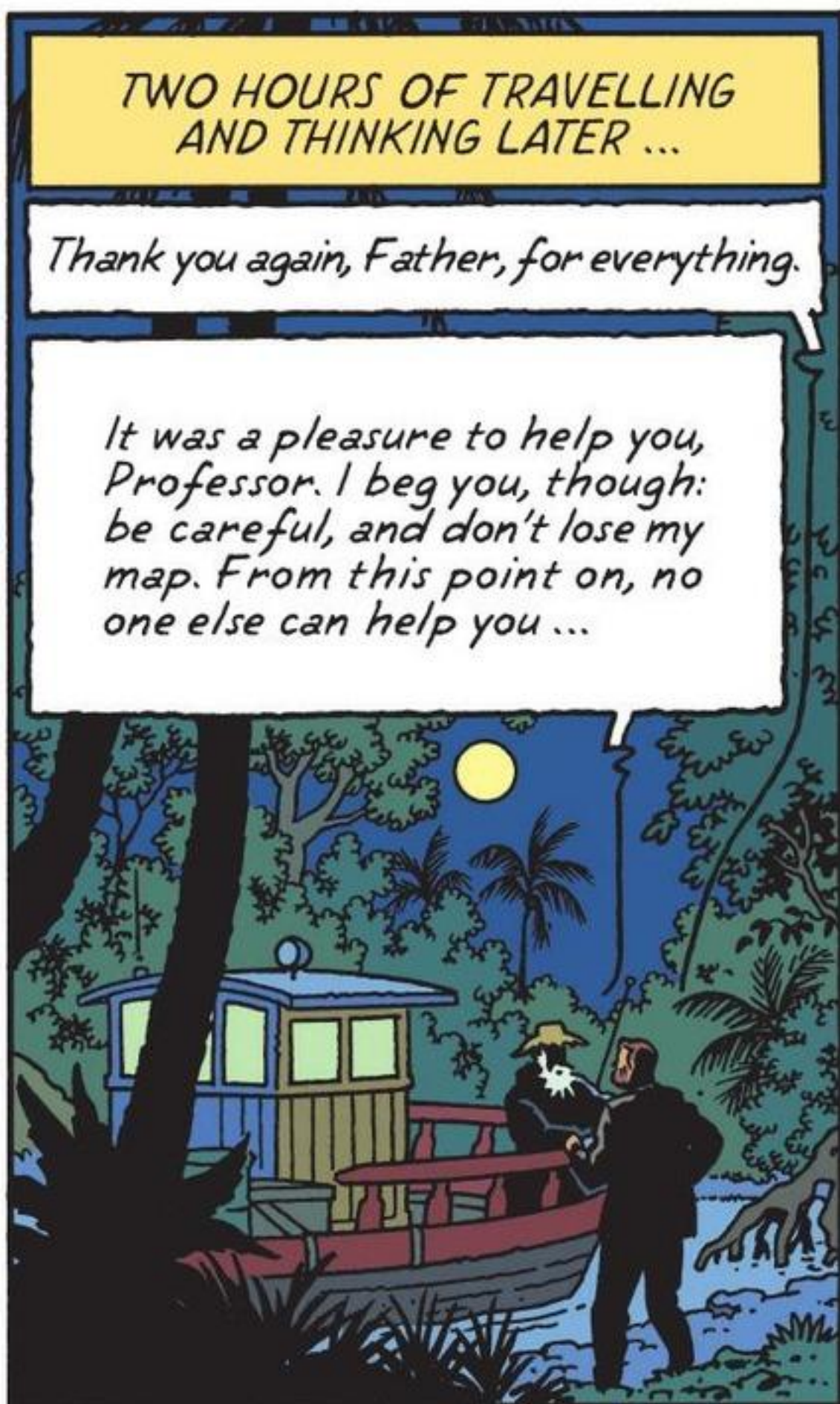
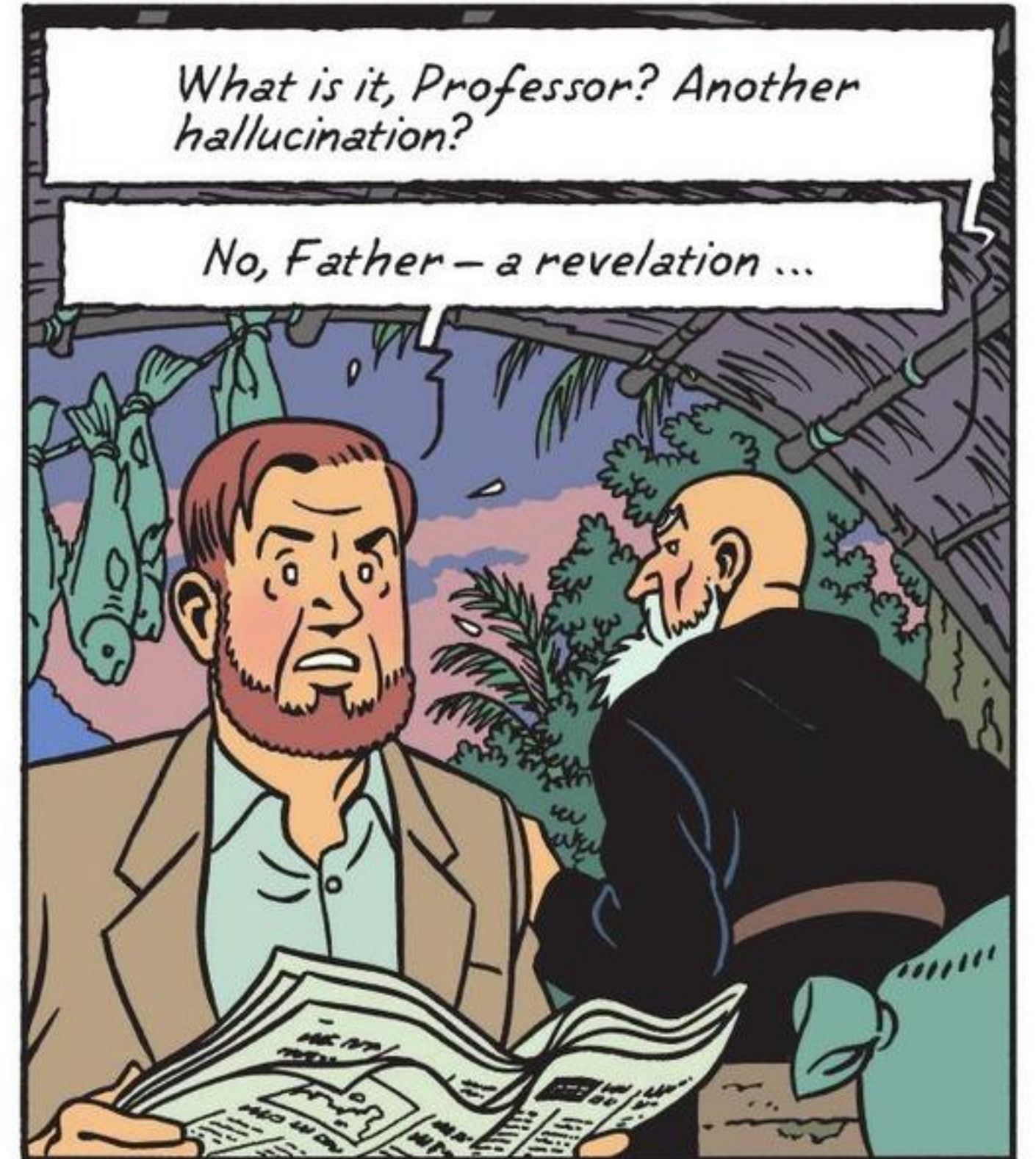
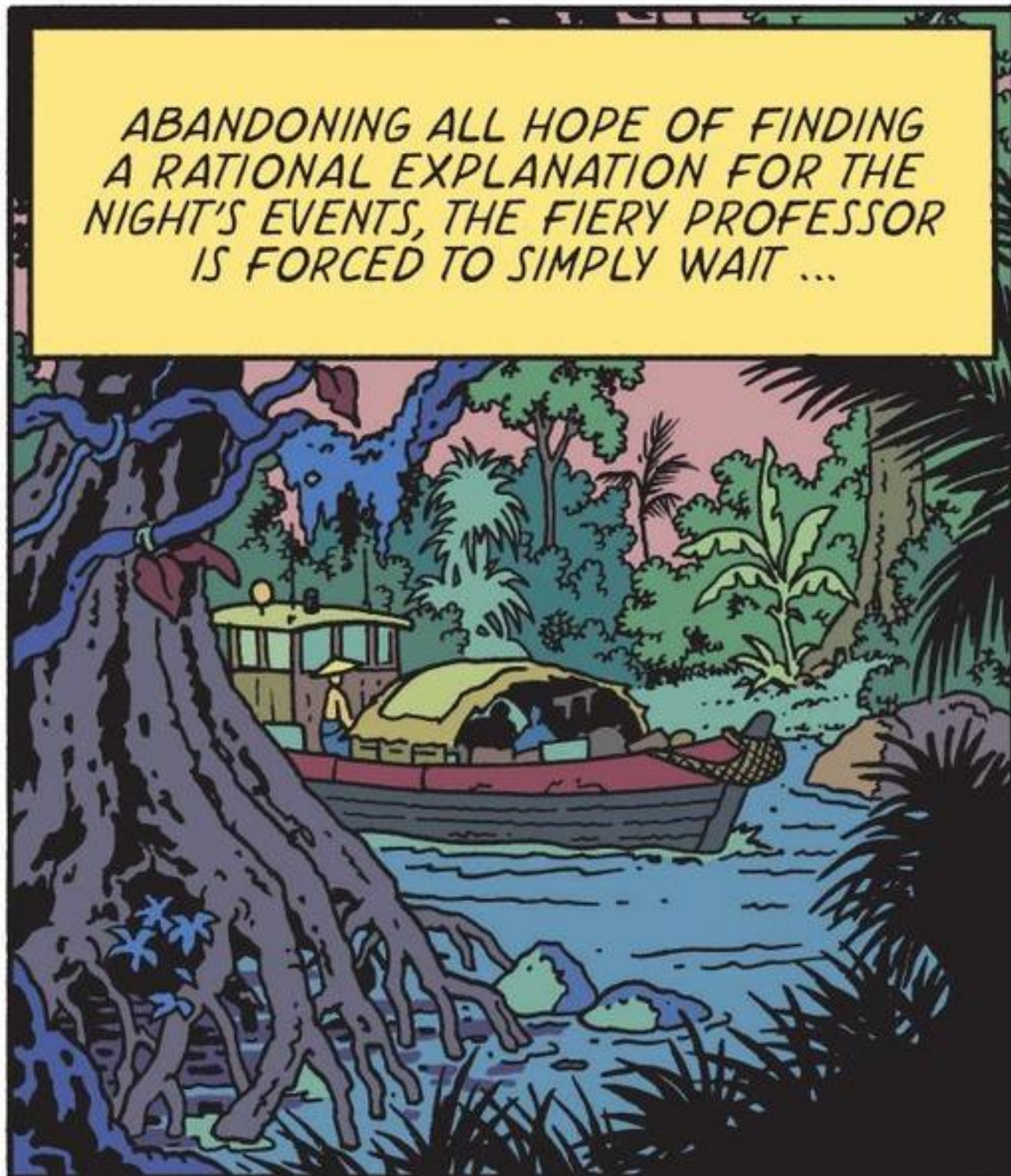


THE PROFESSOR IS AT A LOSS FOR WORDS. HAD HE DREAMT HIS TRIP TO THE VALLEY OF THE IMMORTALS?

Which reminds me ... Slather some of this unguent on yourself—it'll keep those mosquitoes away. It would be ill-advised to get stung again.



AND YET ... THE PEARL HE'S HOLDING IN HIS HAND IS TOO REAL TO BE A DREAM!



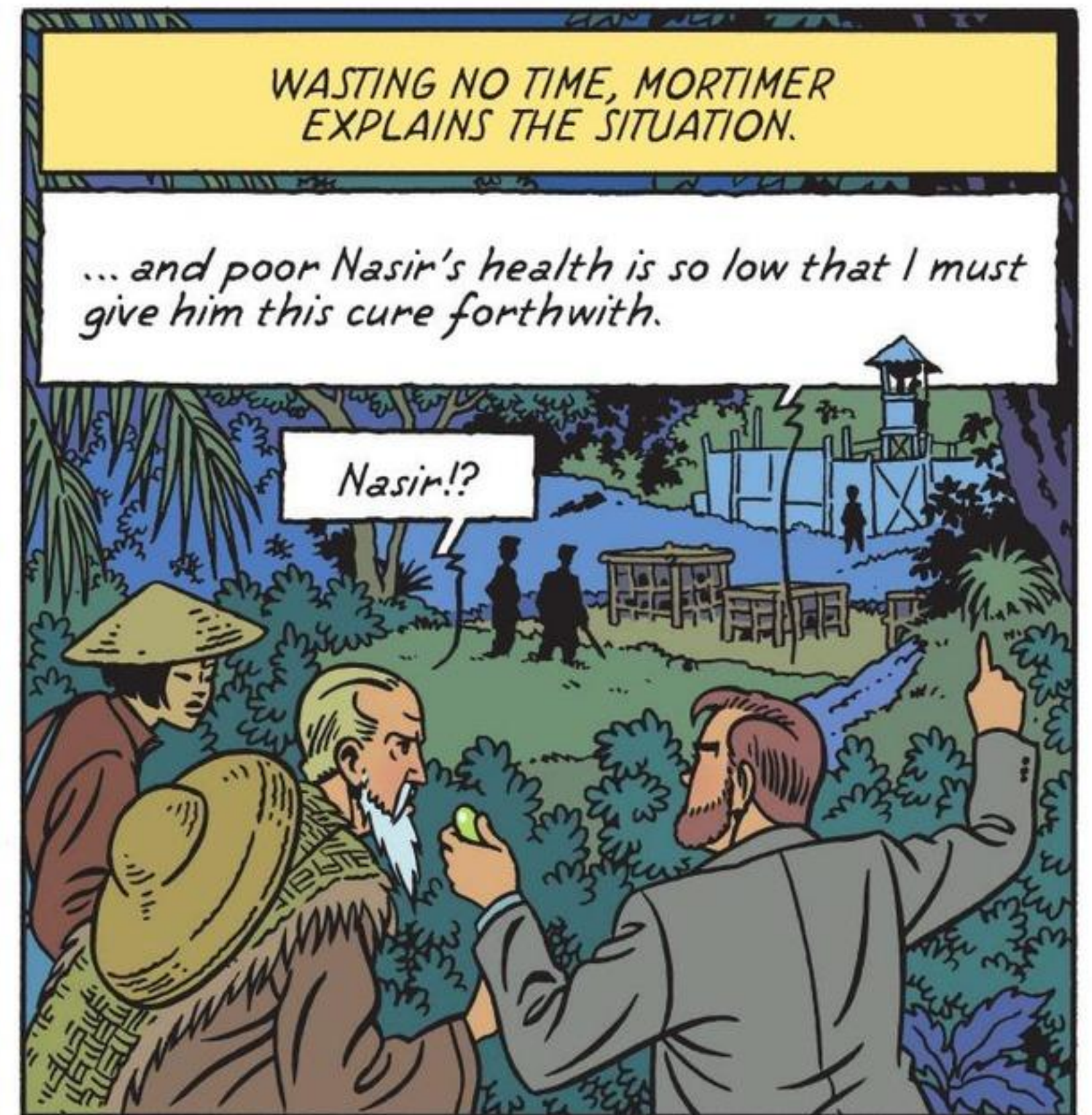


Keep your voice down, Philip. It's I, Francis. Li Hsi's guards are everywhere.



Blake!?

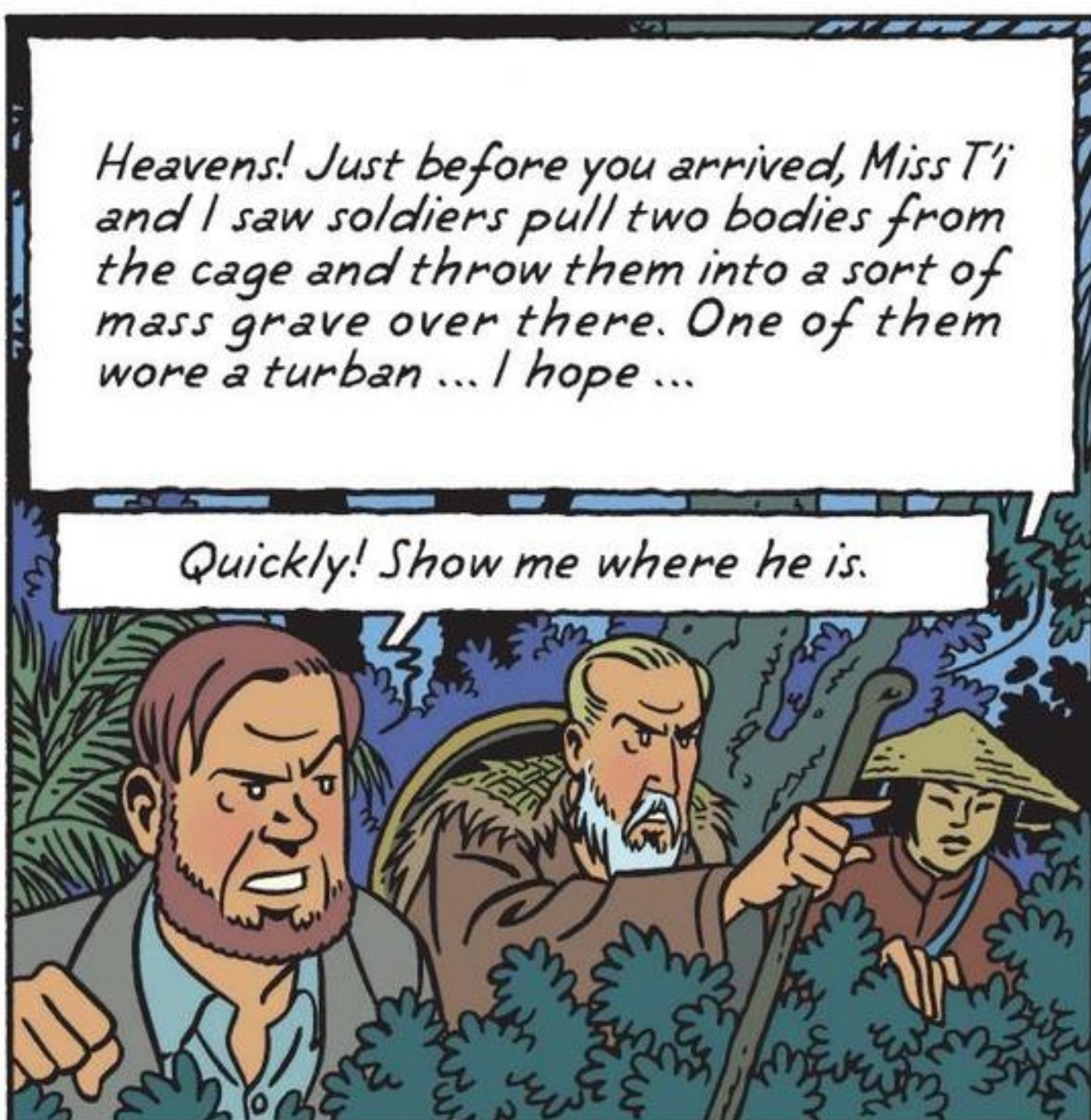
At your service, old chap!



WASTING NO TIME, MORTIMER EXPLAINS THE SITUATION.

... and poor Nasir's health is so low that I must give him this cure forthwith.

Nasir!?



Heavens! Just before you arrived, Miss T'i and I saw soldiers pull two bodies from the cage and throw them into a sort of mass grave over there. One of them wore a turban ... I hope ...

Quickly! Show me where he is.



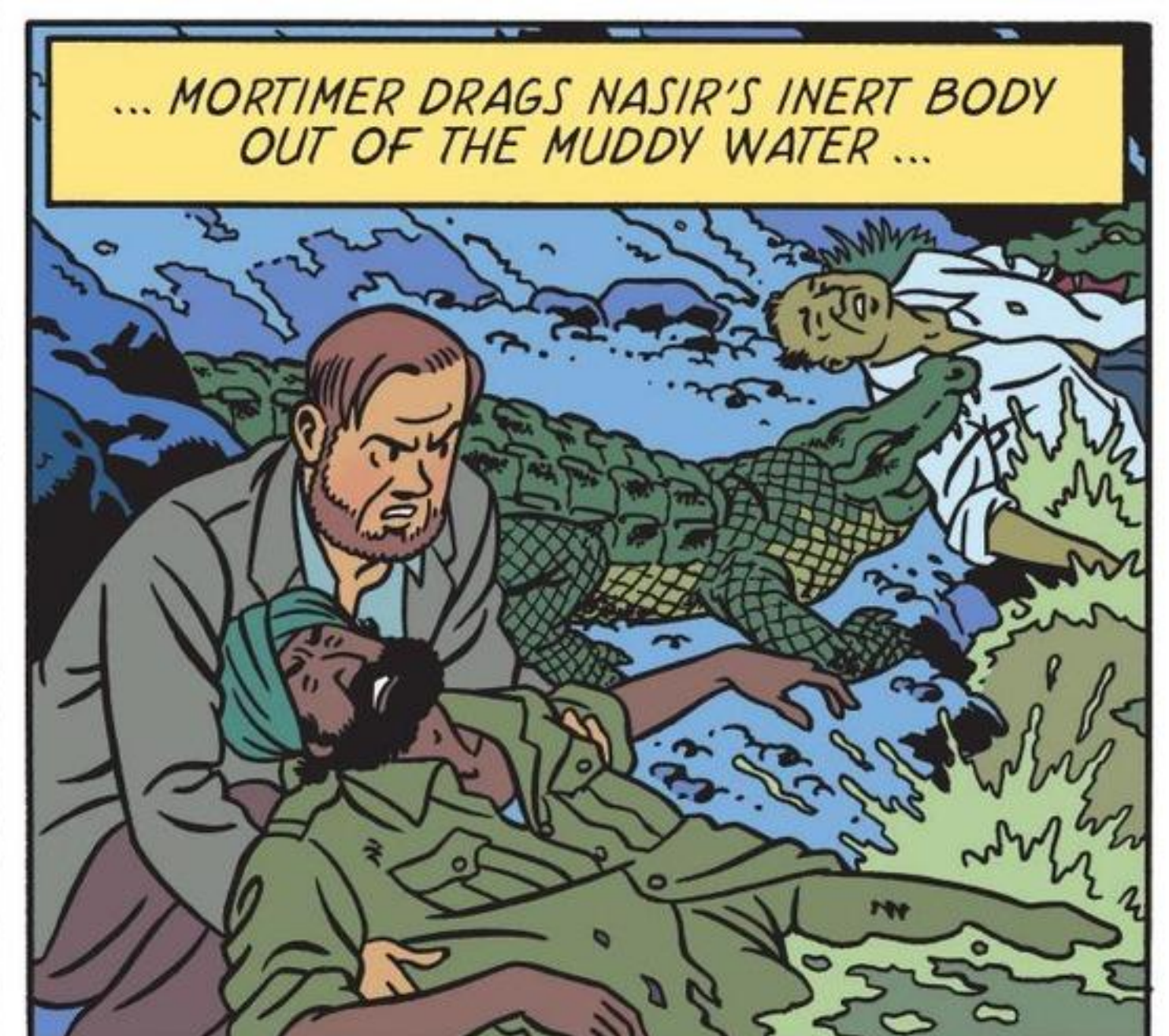
It's there, just behind that embankment ...



Crocodiles! Grab some stout branches!



WHILE BLAKE AND MISS T'I DRIVE THE REPTILES AWAY ...



... MORTIMER DRAGS NASIR'S INERT BODY OUT OF THE MUDDY WATER ...

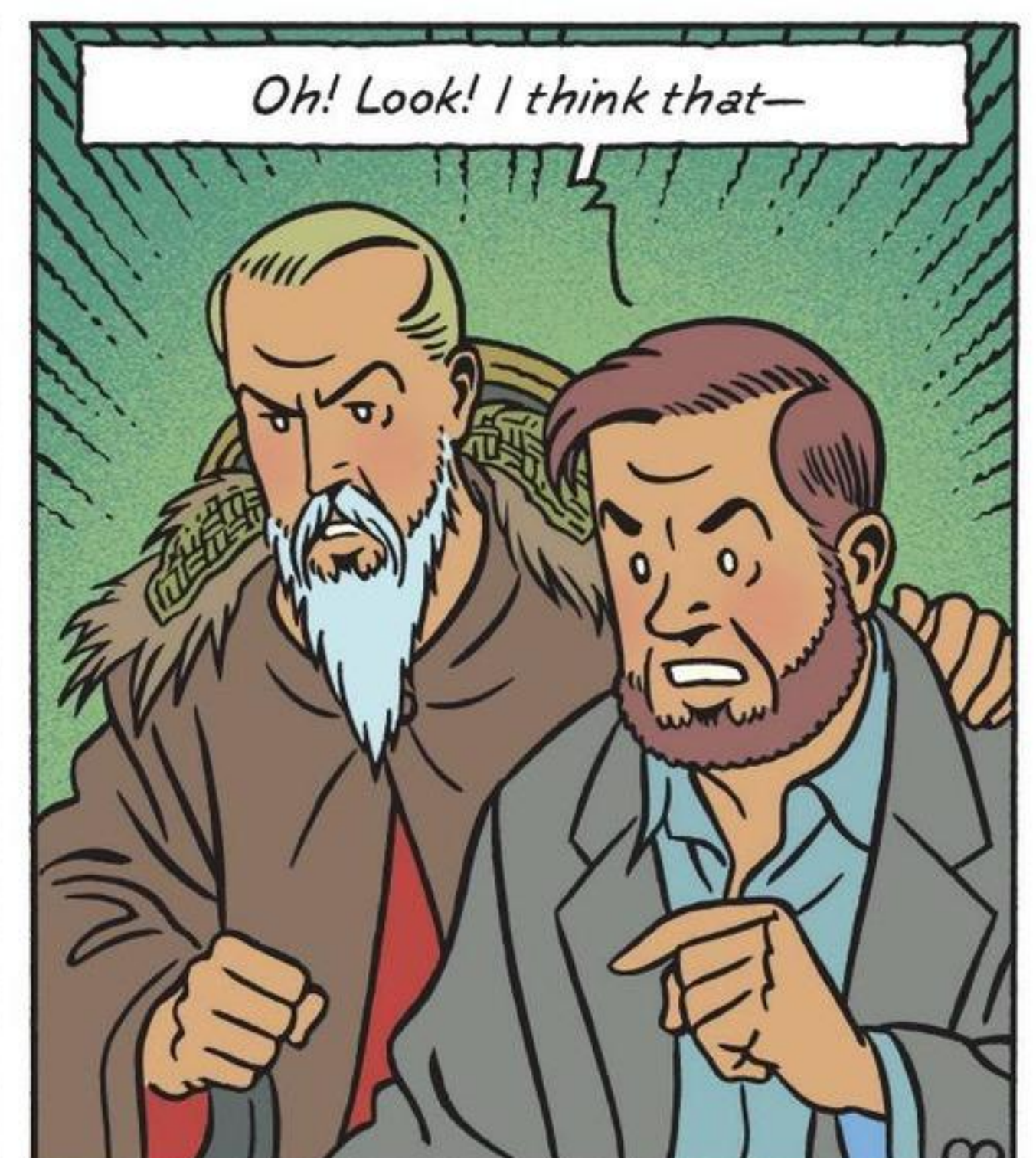


... AND IMMEDIATELY ADMINISTERS THE MYSTERIOUS REMEDY HE BROUGHT BACK FROM THE VALLEY OF THE IMMORTALS.



So?

I don't know. I made him swallow the pearl ...



Oh! Look! I think that—

AS IF BY MIRACLE, NASIR SUDDENLY SITS UP, EYES WILD.

What? ... What am I doing here? Captain Blake? Professor Mortimer? Allah! I must be dreaming!



Welcome back among the living, Sergeant Nasir! You gave us quite a fright, my friend!

This sudden recovery is incredible! What on earth did you give him?



To be completely honest, I don't really know and probably never will. For now, though, we must act swiftly. Hong Kong is in terrible danger.



THE TWO FRIENDS QUICKLY TELL EACH OTHER ABOUT THEIR RESPECTIVE ADVENTURES ...

... And it was on Father Odilon's boat that I saw this article in an old issue of the South China Morning Post. Read it, and you'll understand my concern ...



Blast it! If that article is over a month old, then that means ...

SIR NATHAN CHASE DEAD IN CAR ACCIDENT

We learnt this morning that engineer and recently knighted Sir Nathan Chase (62) has died in a tragic but sadly banal car accident on a Northumberland road. The driver probably failed to notice a traffic light in time. A small crowd quickly gathered at the scene, and several witnesses thought they recognised the victim's face, though no one was able to formally identify the deceased.



'His beautiful bright eyes lit up our lives' simply declared his wife.

Though he was unfailingly humble, it was common knowledge that Sir Nathan had been decorated after the war for serving his country in the mysterious Bletchley Park code-breaking operation. A member of the G.O.C. & Cypher School, his reports revealed that the enemy was popular with every one who knew him and was formidable.

... that 'our' Mr Chase is an impostor. We must warn Admiral Donan immediately! If the Sky Lantern is threatened, the entire Colony is at risk!



There's a wireless transmitter in General Li Hsi's cabin. Contact the base and give the admiral the code 'D', just in case. Then meet me at the airstrip at the western end of the camp. That's where the Red Wings are. All I have to do for it to fly again is connect a single wire ...



A SHORT WHILE LATER, AS THE SUN RISES OVER GENERAL LI HSI'S BASE ...



Miss T'i will come with me. Take these, Nasir, and watch the professor's back. Good luck, old chaps!



Hello? Captain Blake calling secret base! Do you read?
Hello? ... A pox on this - I can't raise the base!

The Marine Police probably have better wireless coverage overall ...

THE NATIONALIST AGENT'S SUGGESTION SOON PROVES TO BE ACCURATE, AND IN HONG KONG ...

Chief Inspector Flagstaff! Sir! Wake up, sir!

IT TAKES LESS THAN 60 SECONDS FOR FLAGSTAFF TO LEAP OUT OF BED TO HEAR BLAKE.

... What did you say?! Mr Chase?! Are you certain?
... I can barely hear you ... Can you repeat that?
Transmit code 'D' to the Rear Admiral? ... Very well ... Understood ... Hello? Captain? Are you still there?

UNFORTUNATELY, THE CAPTAIN IS NO LONGER IN A POSITION TO ANSWER, AS THE SOUND OF HIS VOICE HAS EVENTUALLY AWAKENED GENERAL LI HSI.

Who are you, you filthy spy? What are you doing in my quarters?
Guaaaards!

停止

TSHAK

He's out cold. Let's go.

One last thing—as a diversion ...

PAK

No-o-o-o-o!

THE HORRIFIED GENERAL, HAVING COME TO, CAN DO NOTHING BUT WATCH AS SHAO'S PRICELESS MANUSCRIPT GOES UP IN SMOKE.

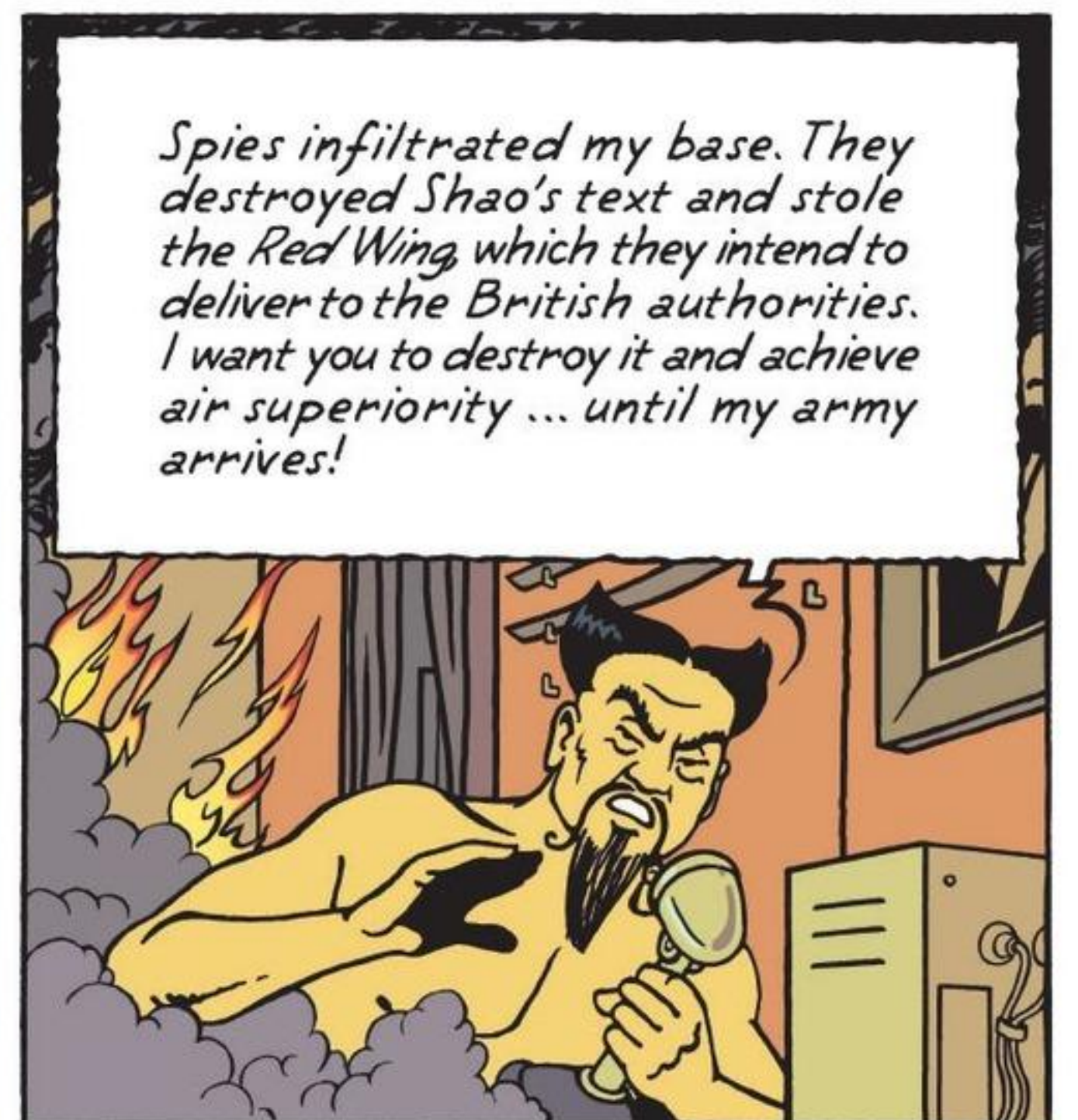
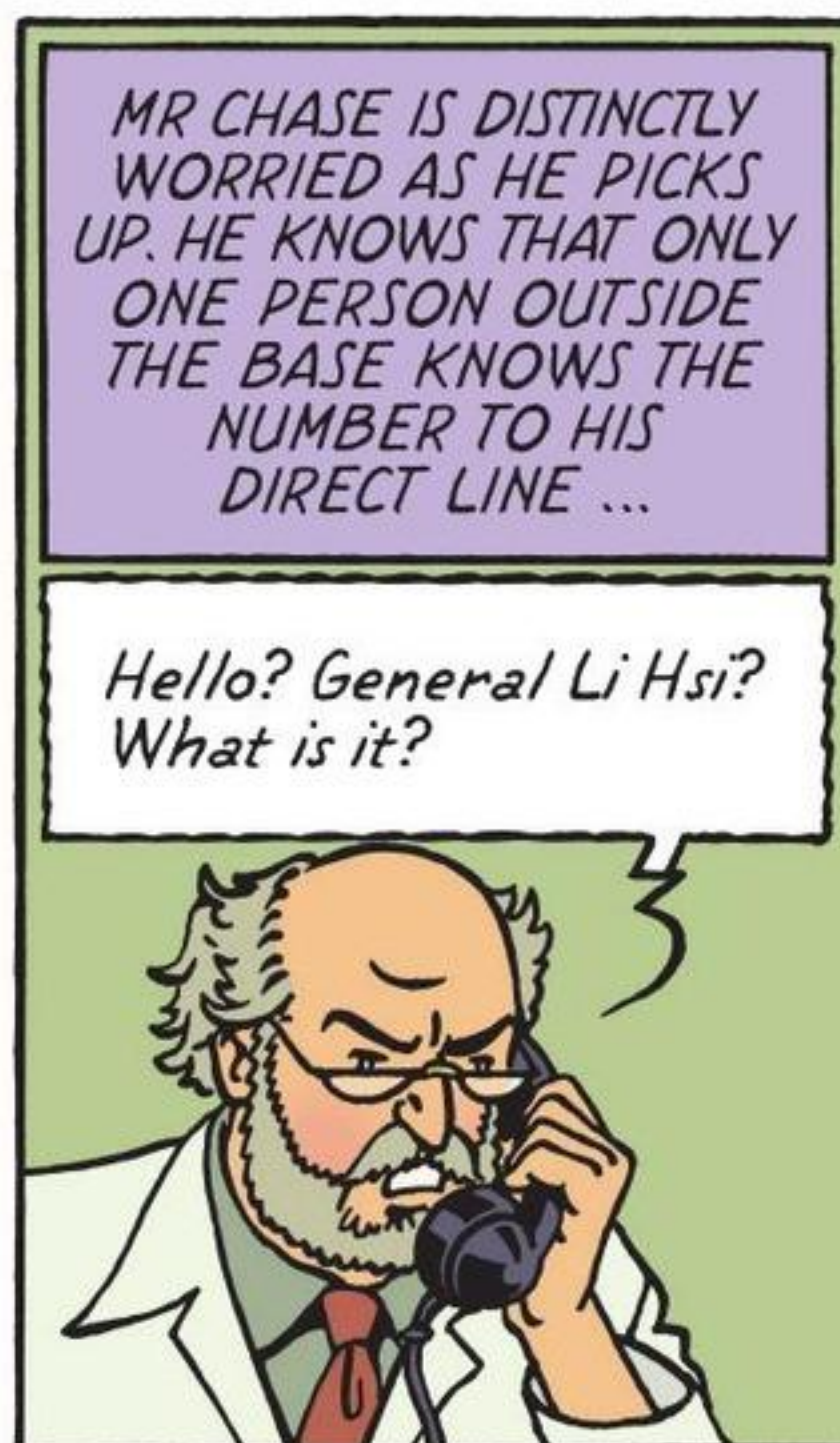
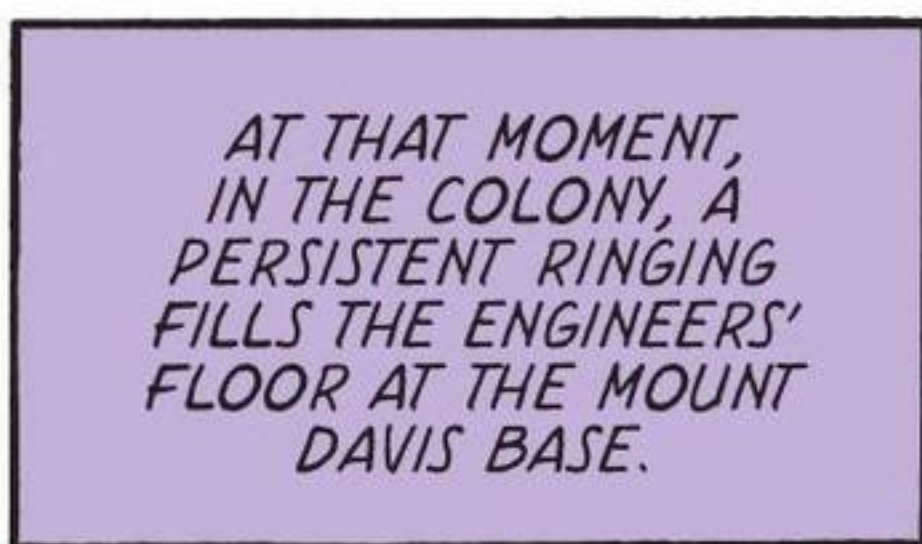
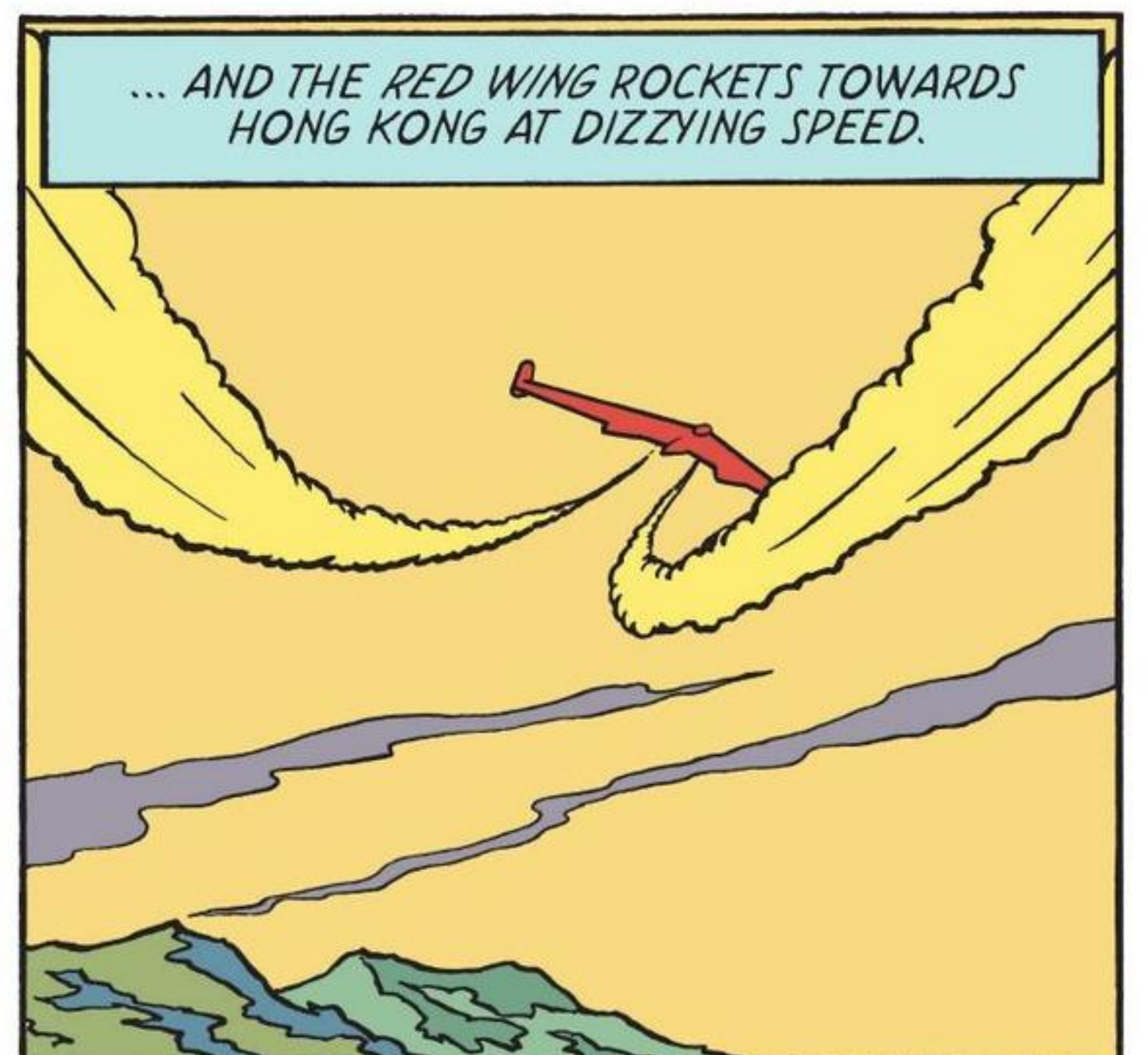
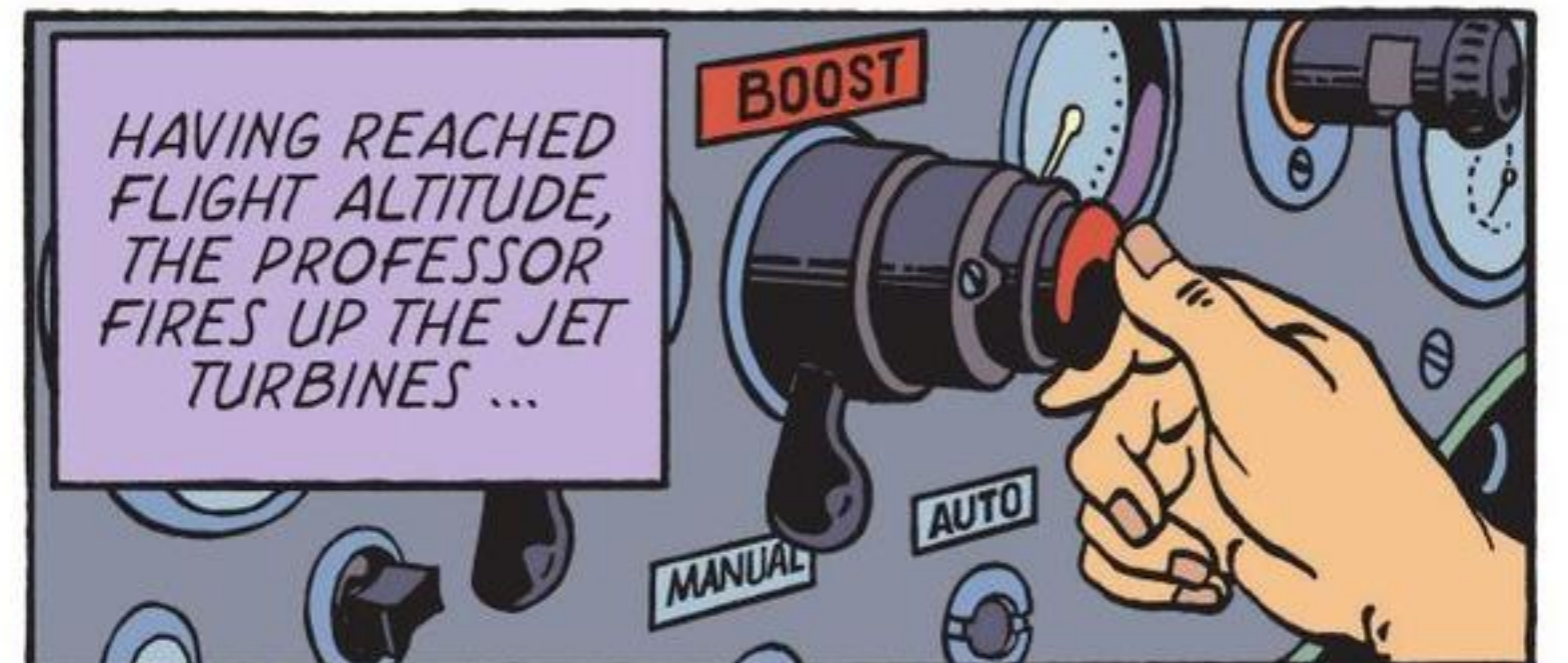
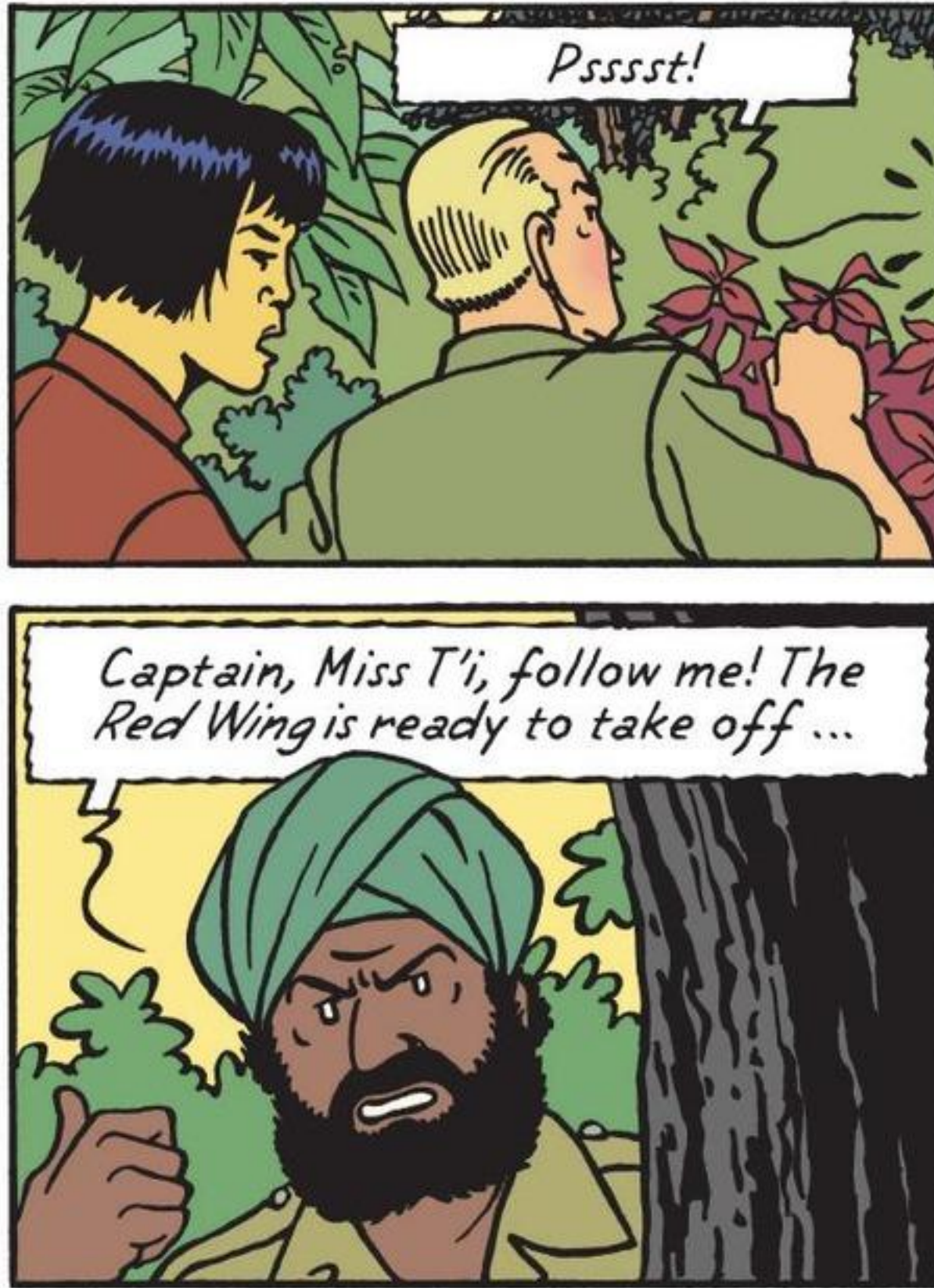
General! We must get out! Come!

No-o-o-o! The evidence of my lineage! I am the Son of Heaven! I am emperor!

Aaarrrrgh! English swine! I'm going to ...

IN A FLASH, IGNORING THE FLAMES CRAWLING TOWARDS HIM, THE GENERAL GRABS THE MICROPHONE OF THE WIRELESS AND CONTACTS THE NUMBER HIS SPY LEFT HIM.

Hello? Hello? By all the hair in Shih-huang-ti's beard, Colonel, pick up!





Admiral Donan! Chief Inspector Flagstaff wants to talk to you. It's urgent.

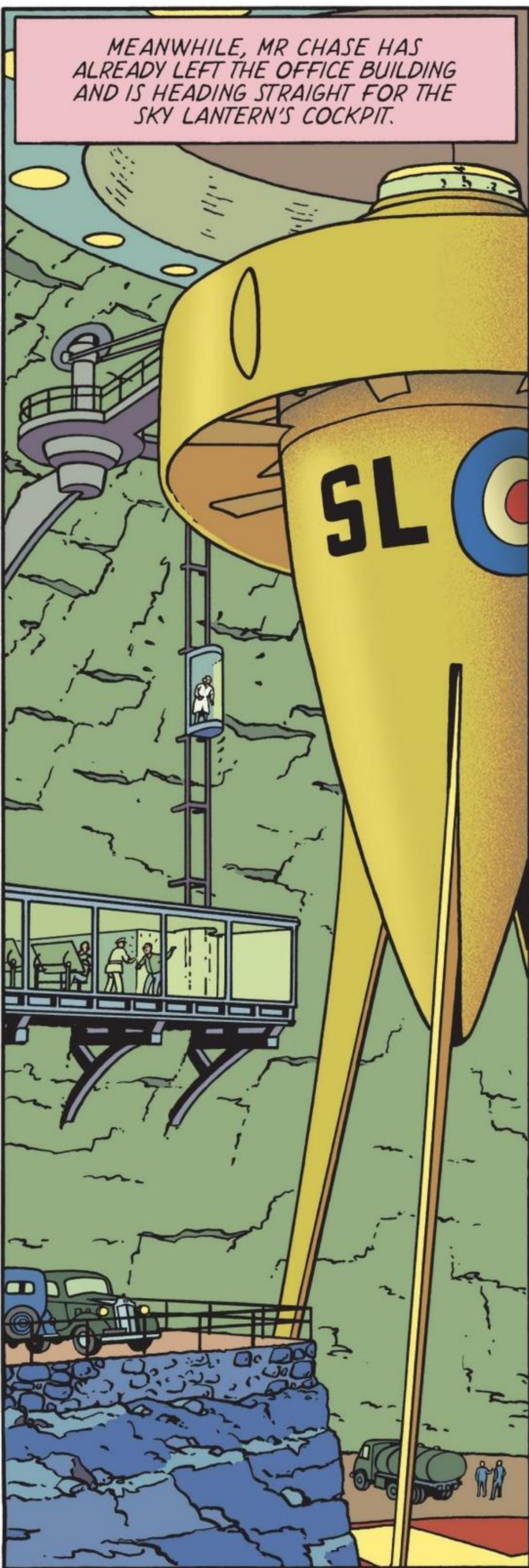
Have the call transferred here.



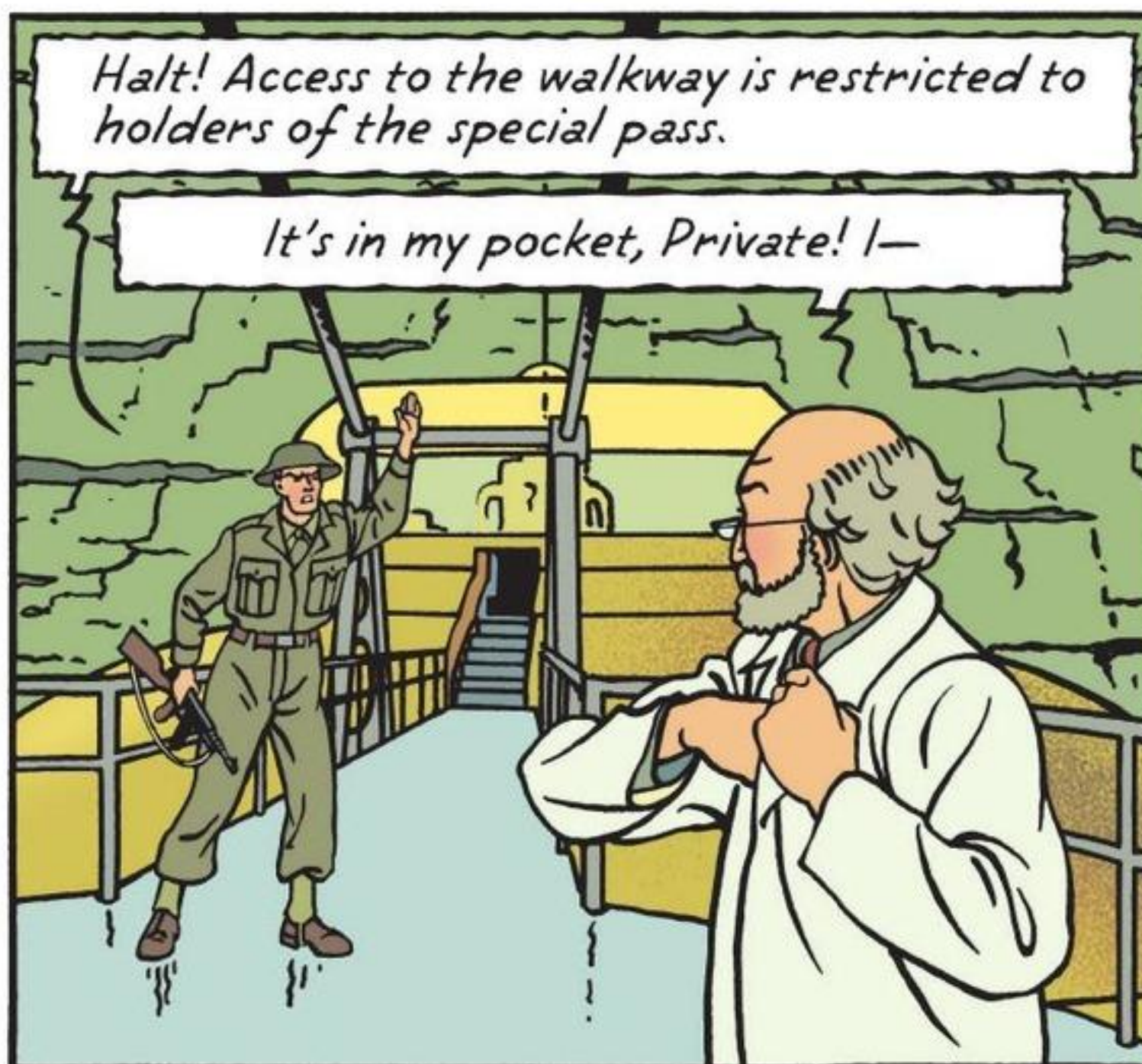
Come again, Chief Inspector?! Mr Chase? ... He was right here just a minute ago, why? ... Code 'D'?! How did you get— It's top secret! ... Blake?! Do you even realise what—



Trust me, Admiral. The situation is critical. Captain Blake was clear: if this fake Mr Chase succeeds in stealing your secret machine, the Colony will be in dire peril!

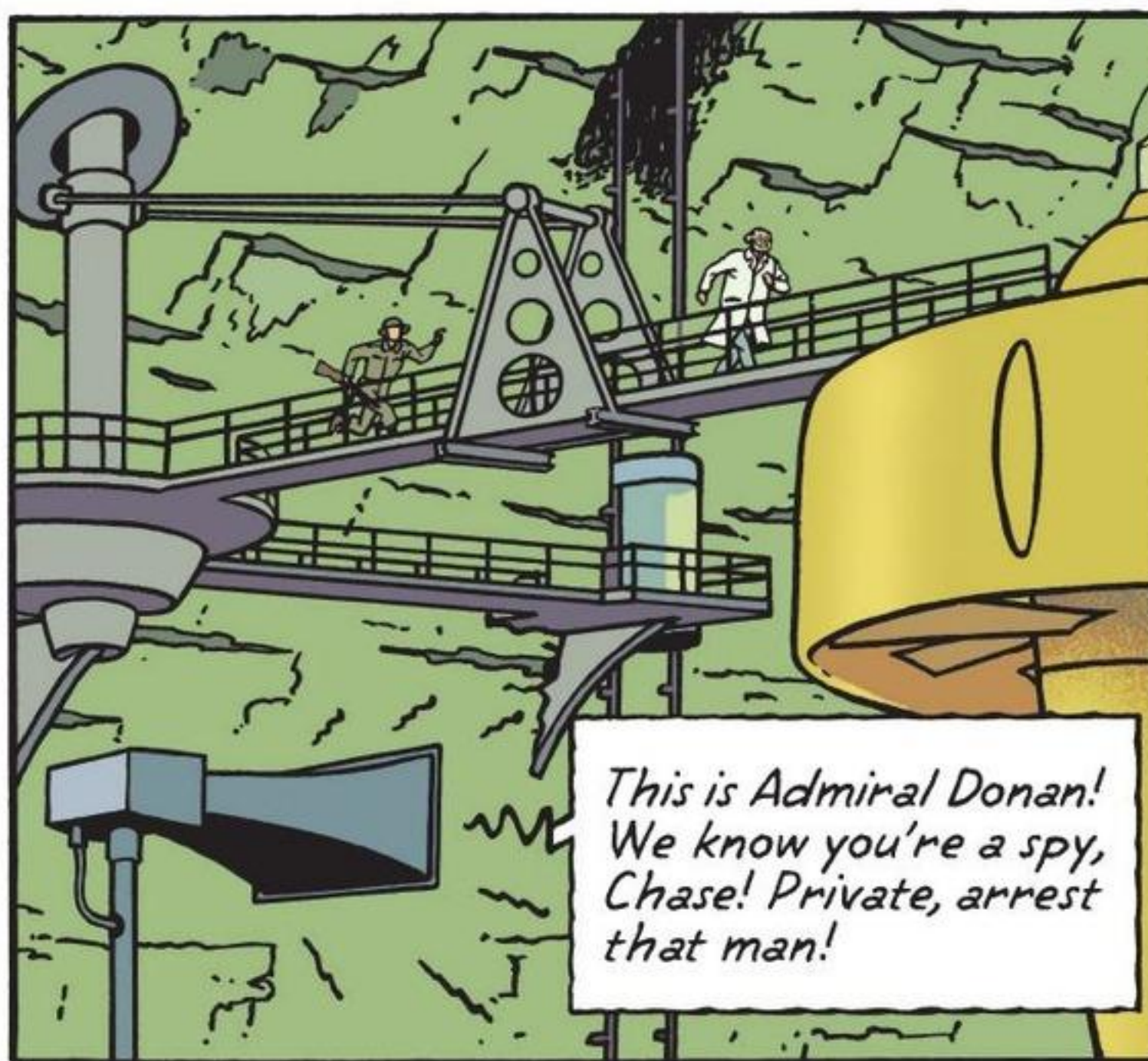


MEANWHILE, MR CHASE HAS ALREADY LEFT THE OFFICE BUILDING AND IS HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THE SKY LANTERN'S COCKPIT.

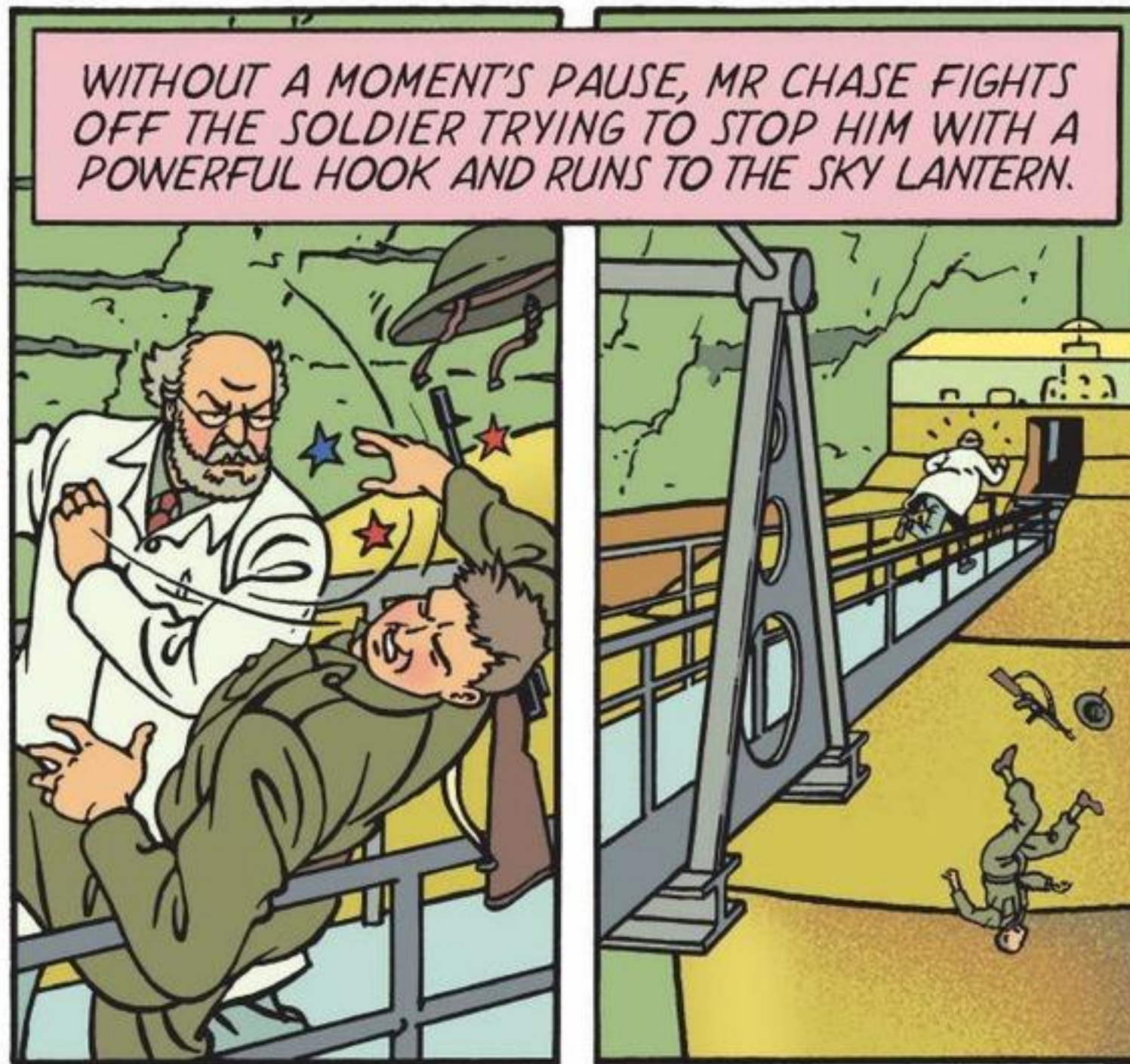


Halt! Access to the walkway is restricted to holders of the special pass.

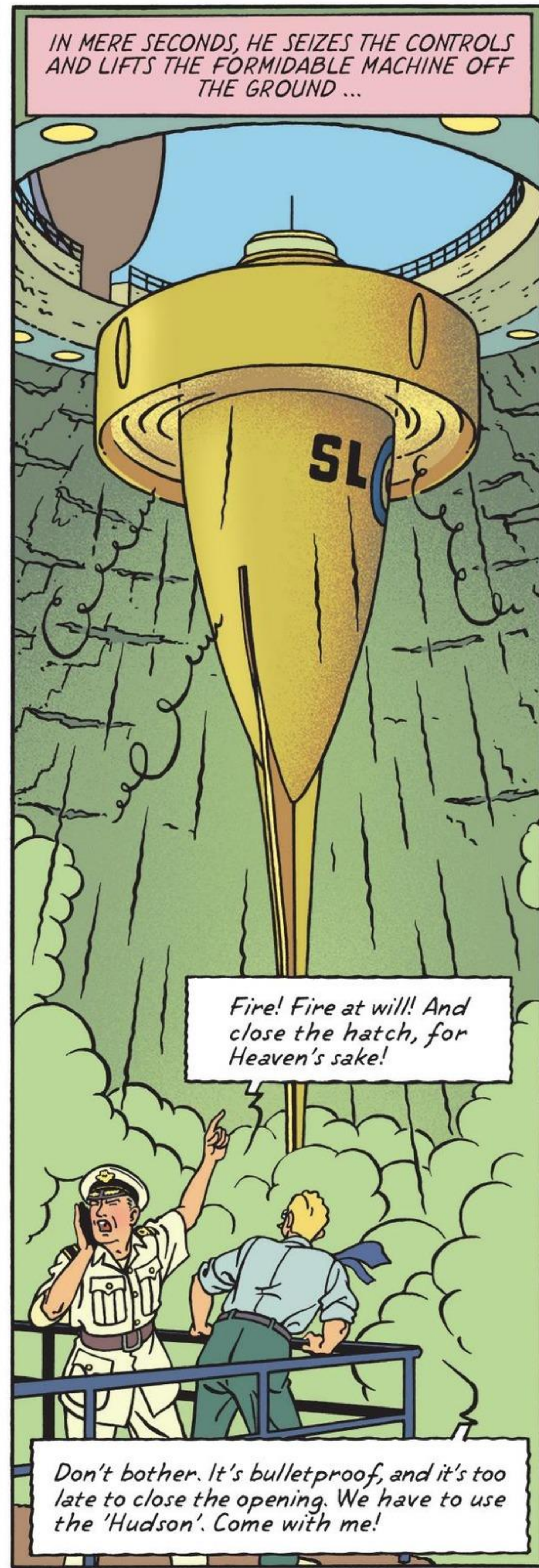
It's in my pocket, Private! I—



This is Admiral Donan! We know you're a spy, Chase! Private, arrest that man!



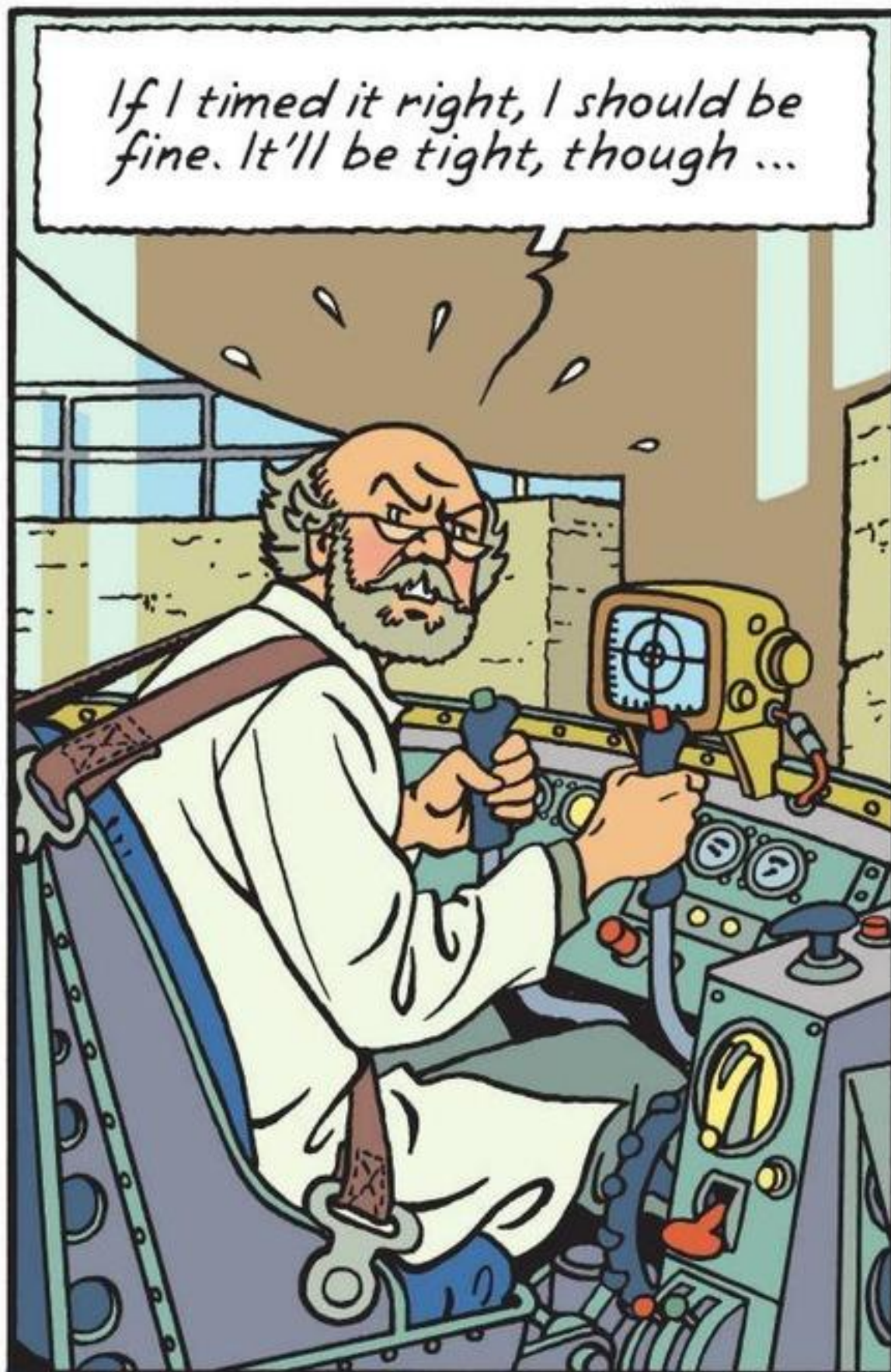
WITHOUT A MOMENT'S PAUSE, MR CHASE FIGHTS OFF THE SOLDIER TRYING TO STOP HIM WITH A POWERFUL HOOK AND RUNS TO THE SKY LANTERN.



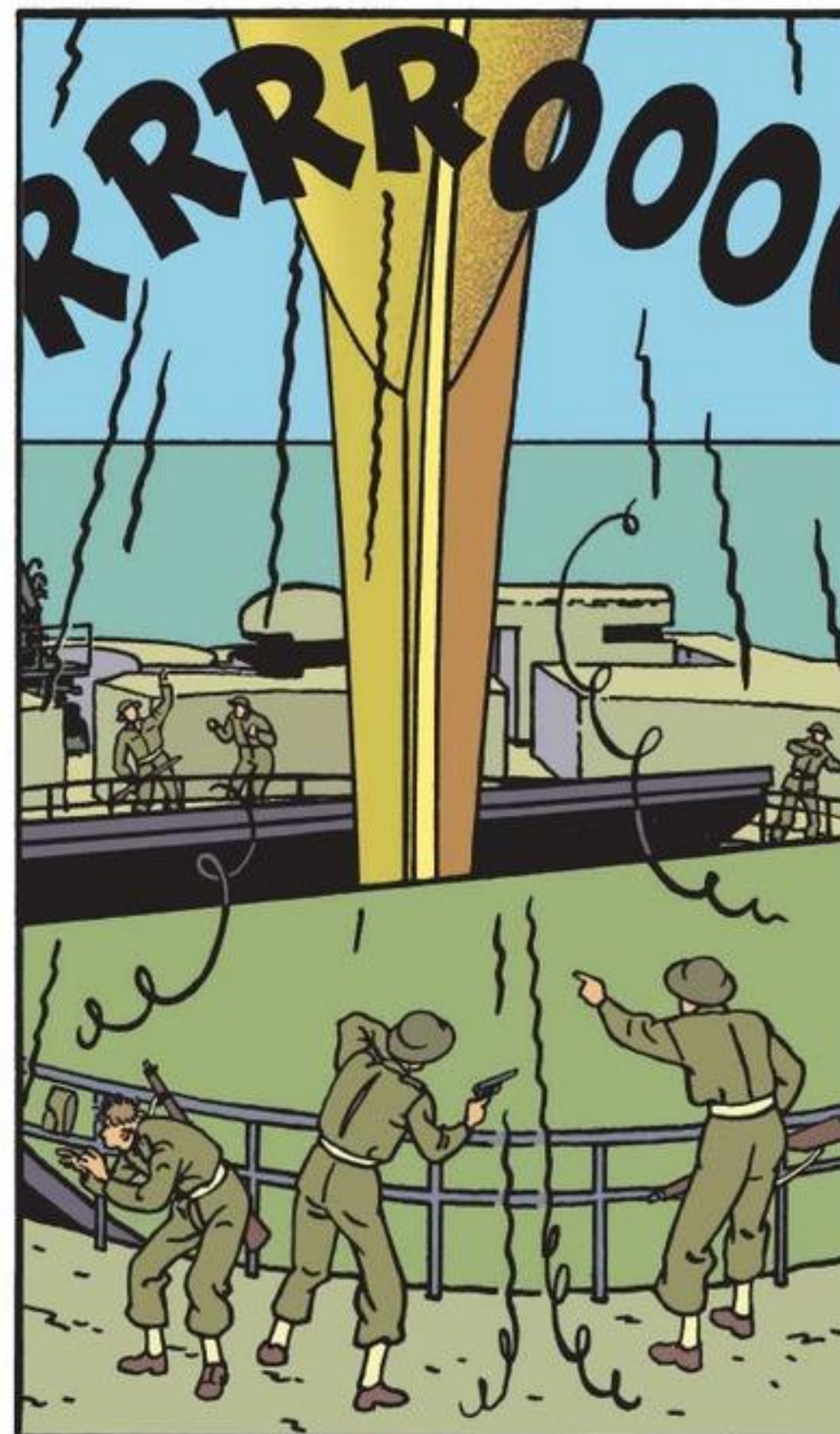
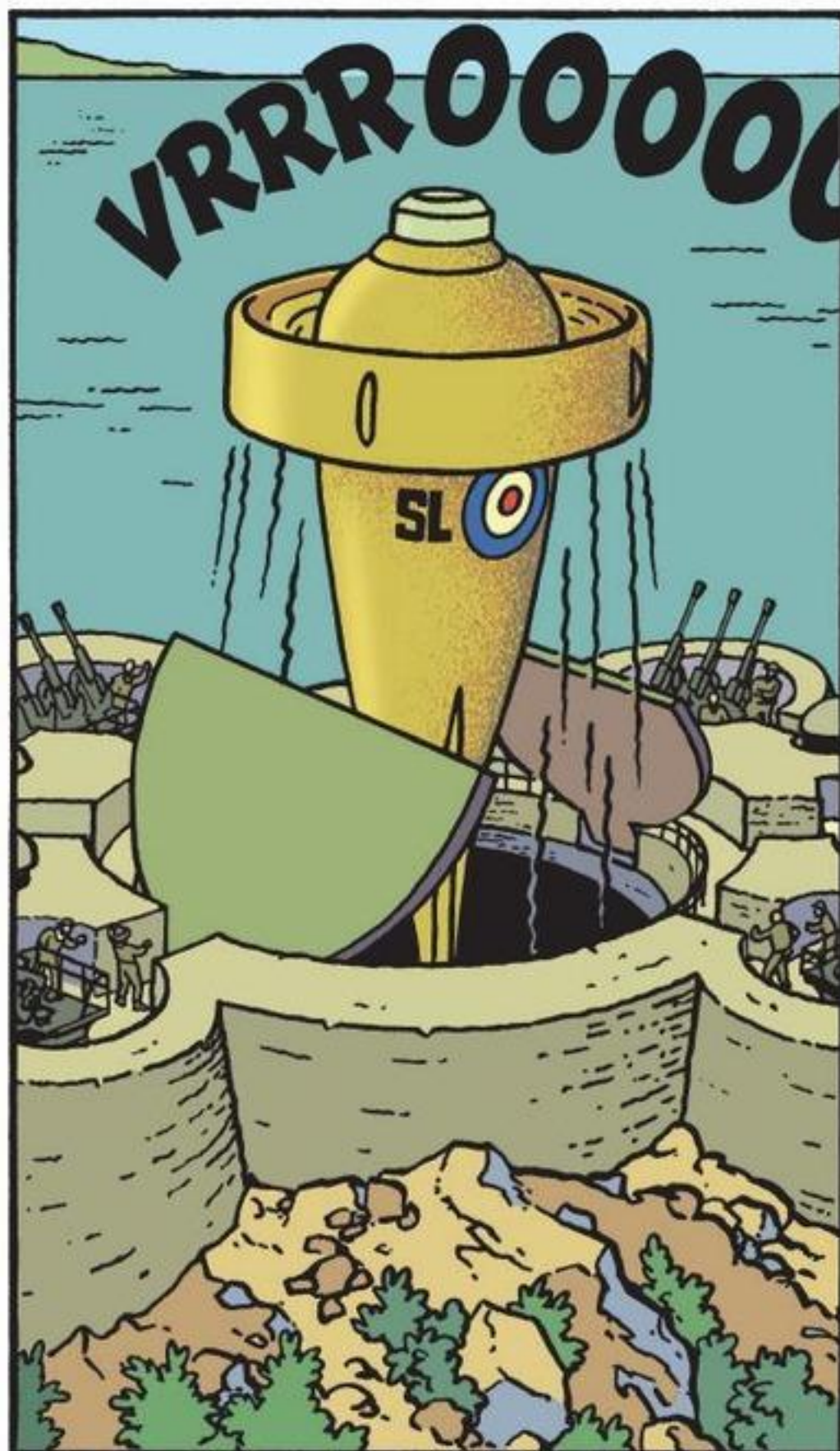
IN MERE SECONDS, HE SEIZES THE CONTROLS AND LIFTS THE FORMIDABLE MACHINE OFF THE GROUND ...

Fire! Fire at will! And close the hatch, for Heaven's sake!

Don't bother. It's bulletproof, and it's too late to close the opening. We have to use the 'Hudson'. Come with me!



If I timed it right, I should be fine. It'll be tight, though ...

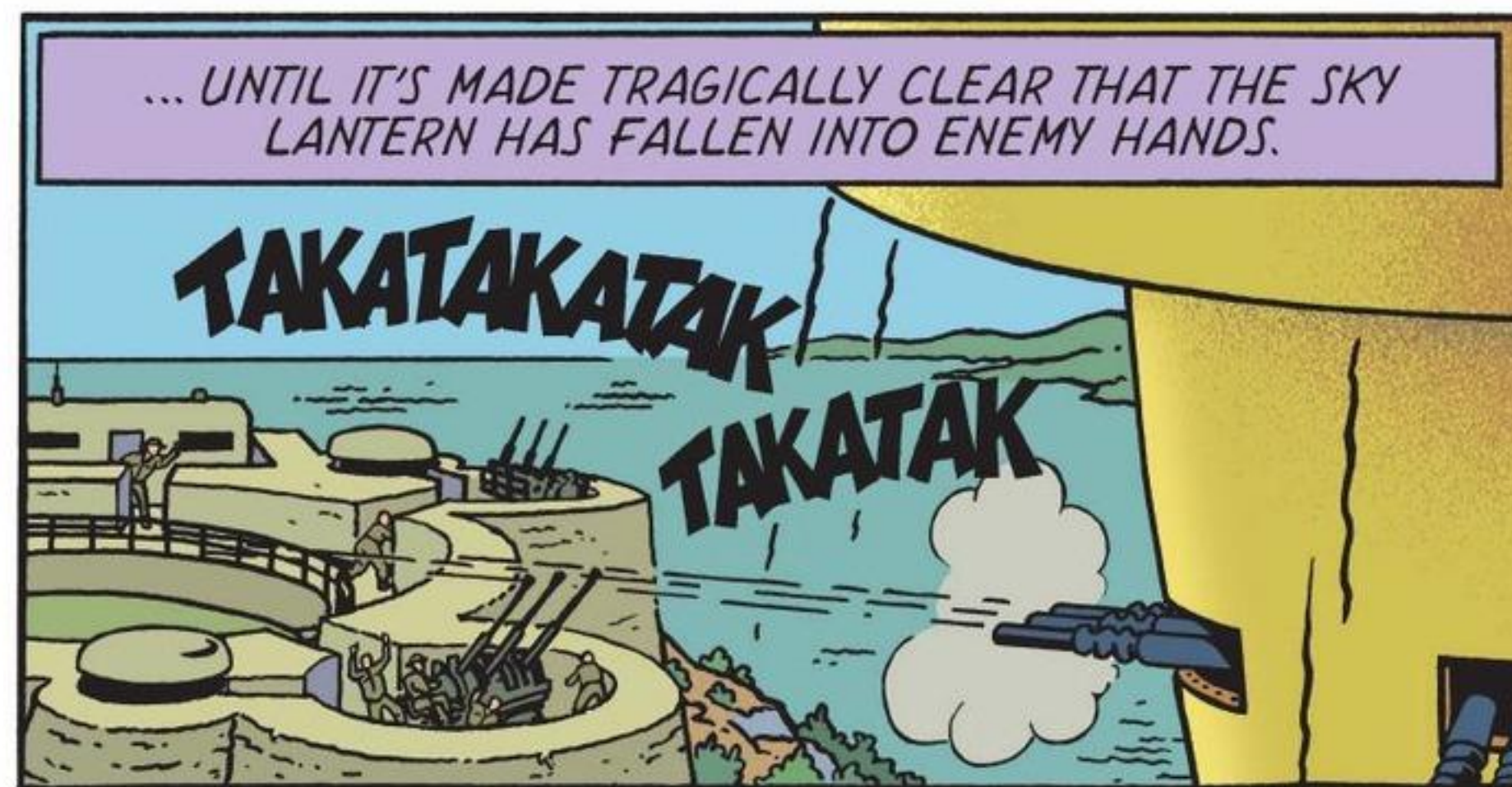


Blast! He made it.

Guard! Open the door! Hurry!



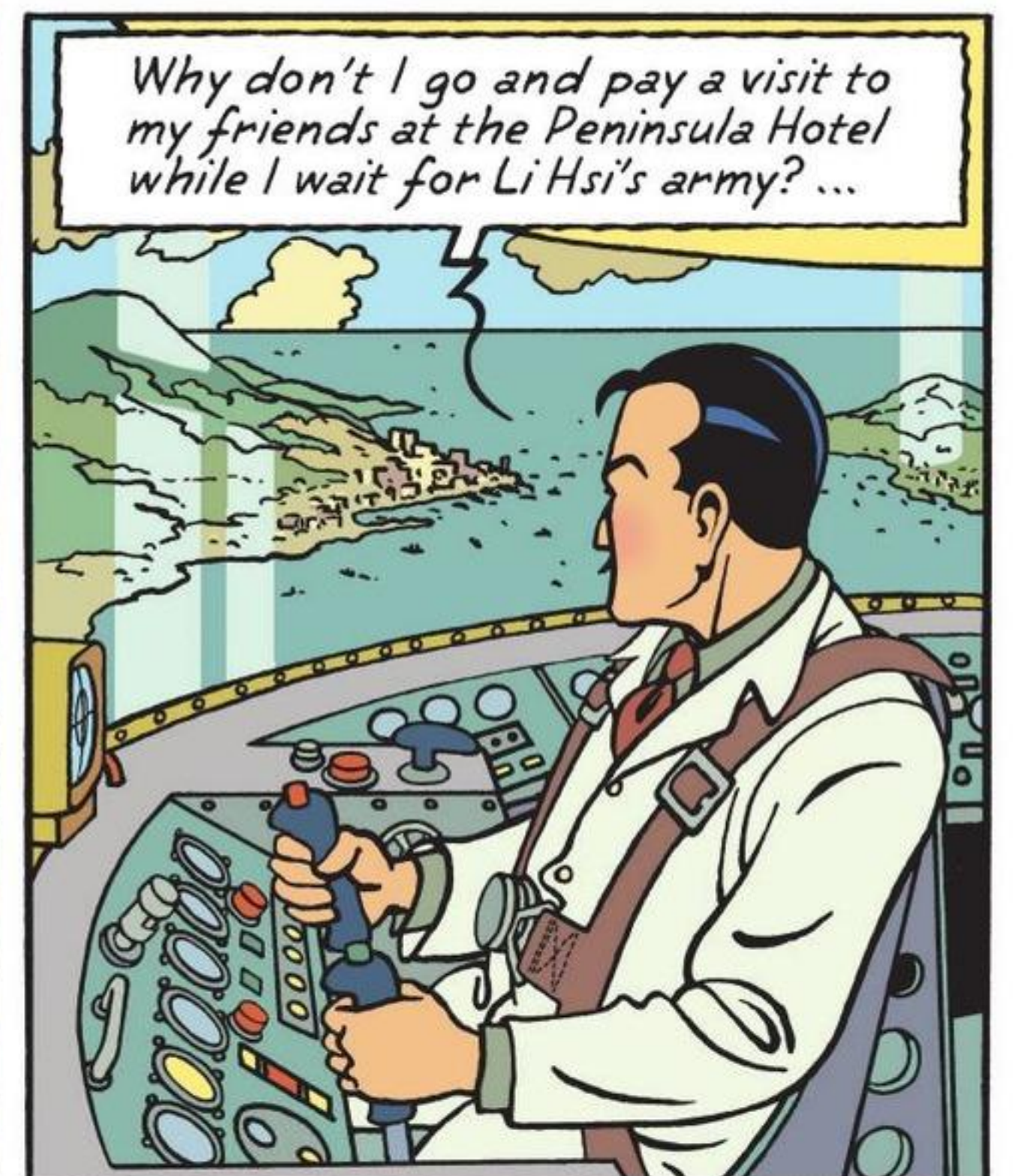
ON THE MOUNTAINTOP, THE SOLDIERS STARE IN DISBELIEF AT THE MYSTERIOUS AIRCRAFT BEARING RAF ROUNDELS ...



... UNTIL IT'S MADE TRAGICALLY CLEAR THAT THE SKY LANTERN HAS FALLEN INTO ENEMY HANDS.



Ha! Ha! Ha! Poor little English cockroaches! Looks like I finally have my revenge! Ha! Ha! Ha!



Why don't I go and pay a visit to my friends at the Peninsula Hotel while I wait for Li Hsi's army? ...



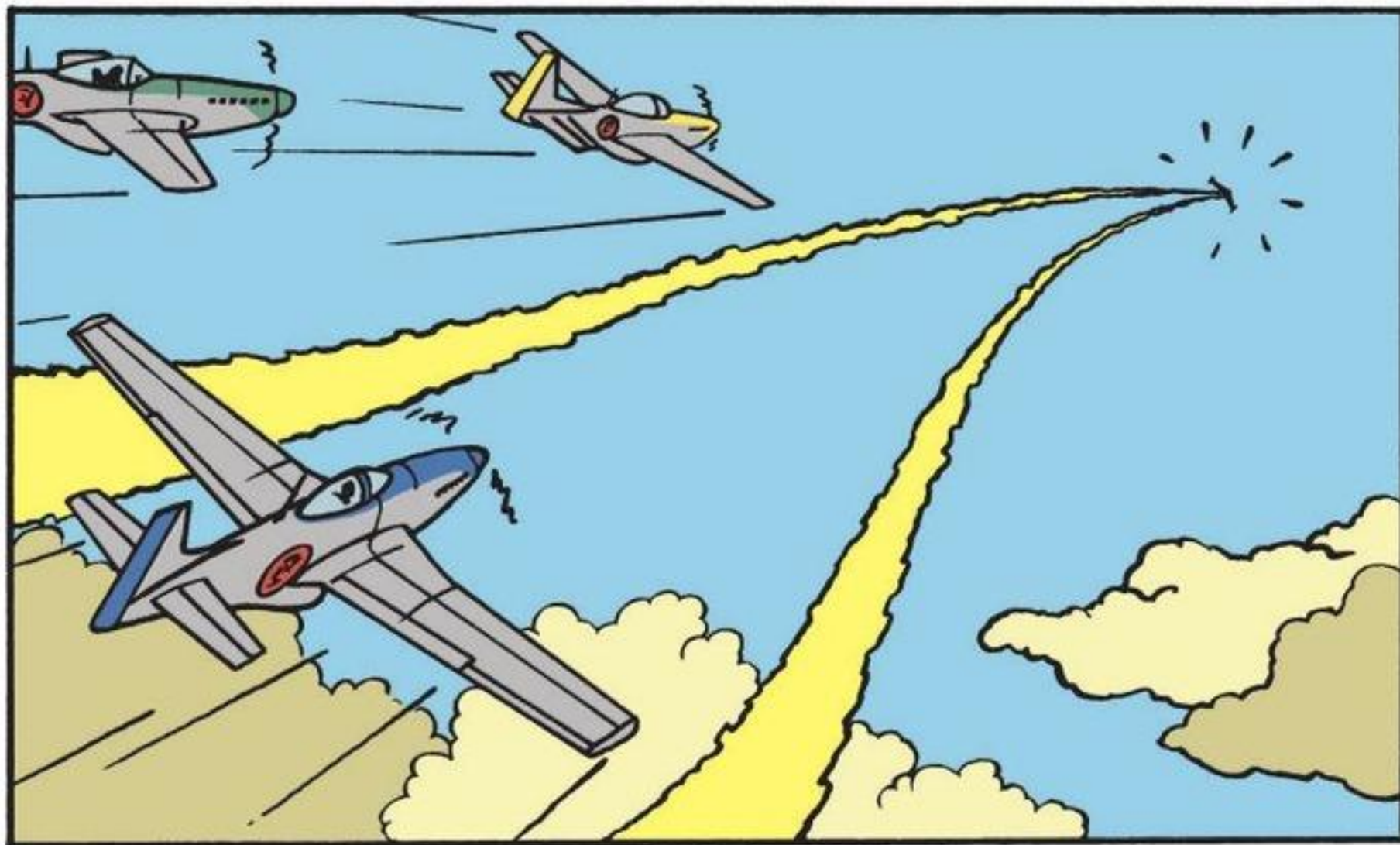
Goodness gracious! That's the secret machine – and the military did lose control of it! ... What are they waiting for? They have to use the self-destruct code Blake provided!



All right, I have the procedure here. With Blake's code we have everything we need ...

Private, raise the surveillance periscope and the emitter antenna!

Yes, sir!

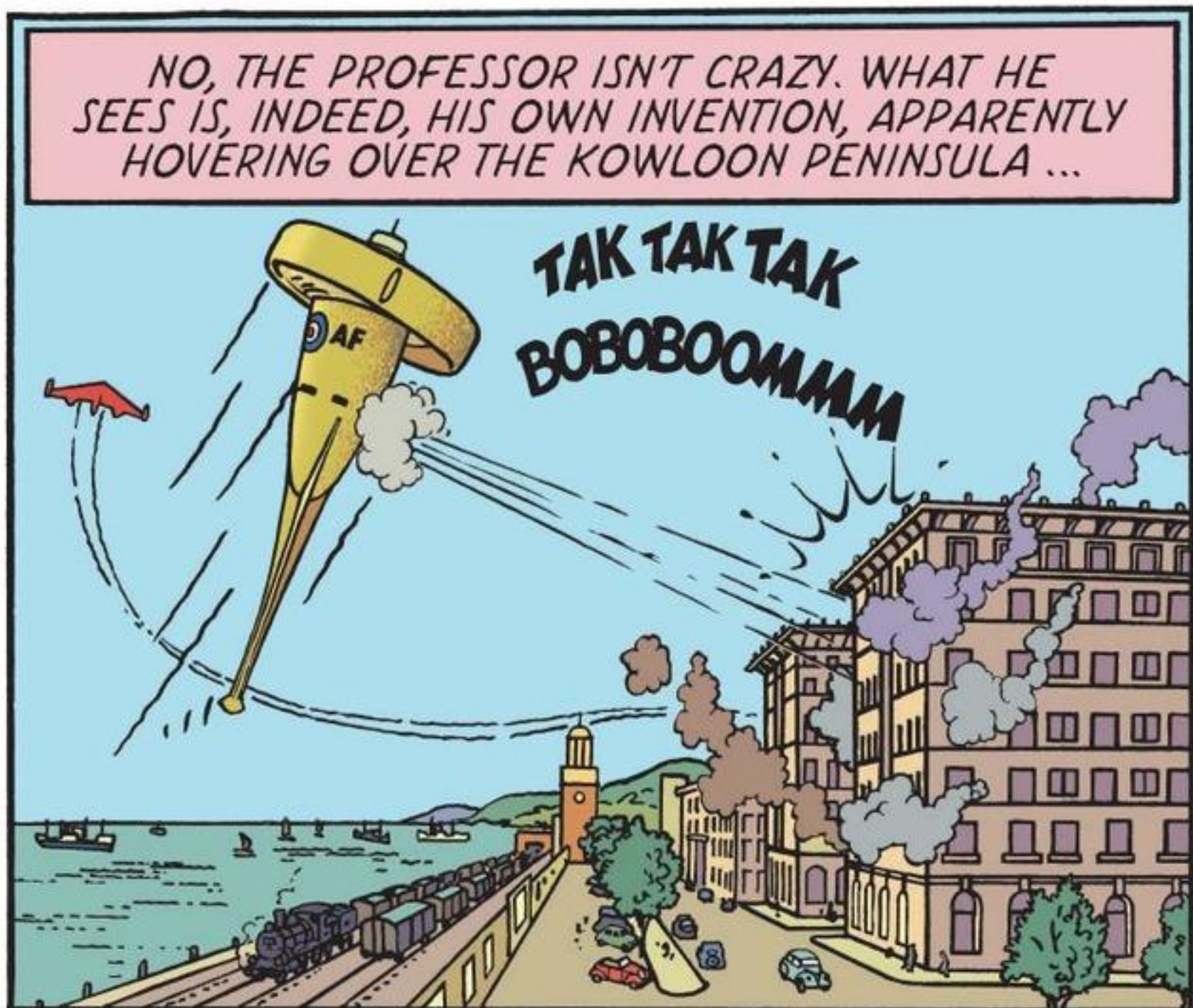


MEANWHILE, THE ASTOUNDING RED WING III HAS COVERED THE DISTANCE SEPARATING SOUTHERN YUNNAN FROM THE BRITISH COLONY, LEAVING FAR BEHIND THE COMMUNIST FIGHTERS INCAPABLE OF INTERCEPTING IT.

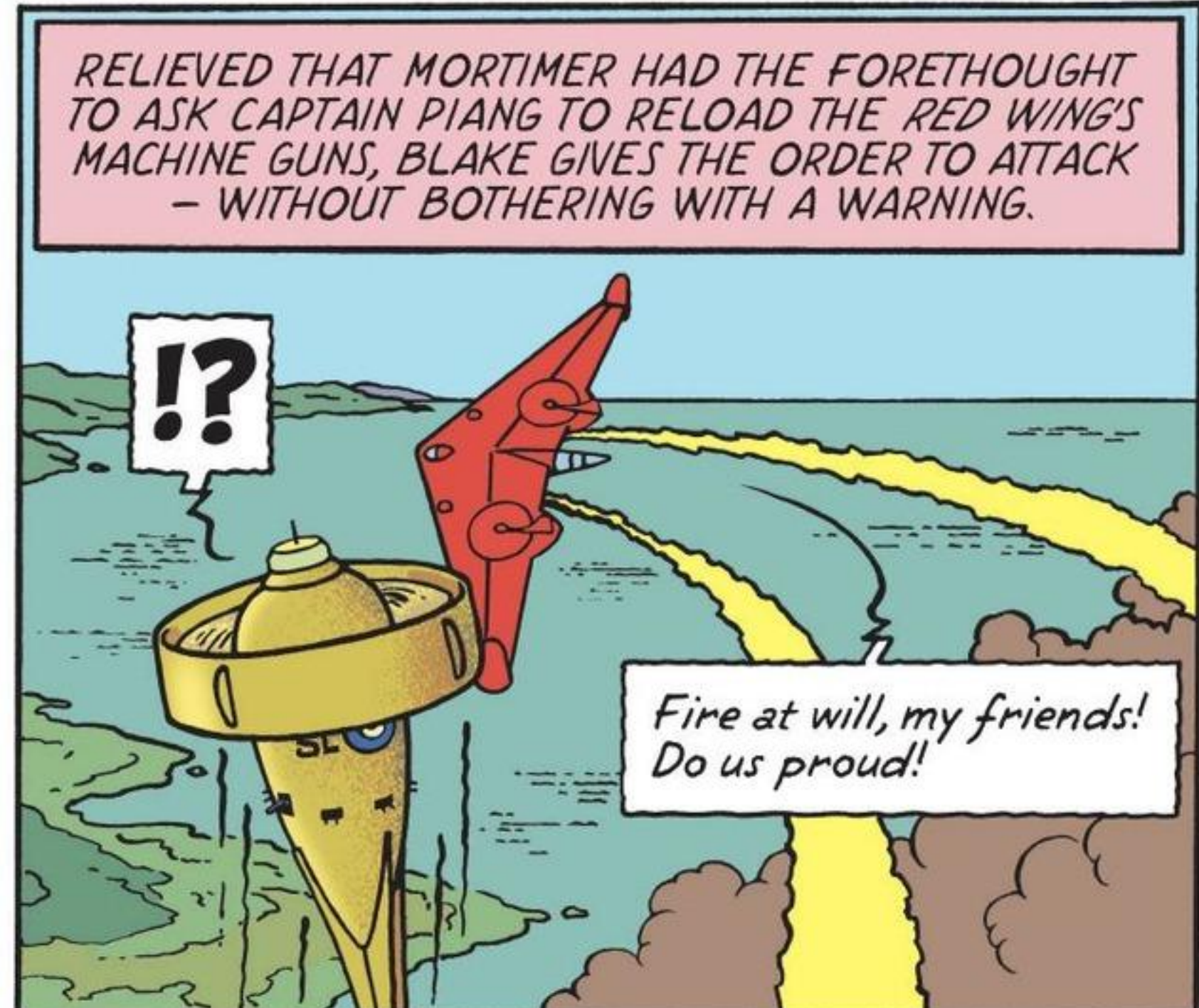
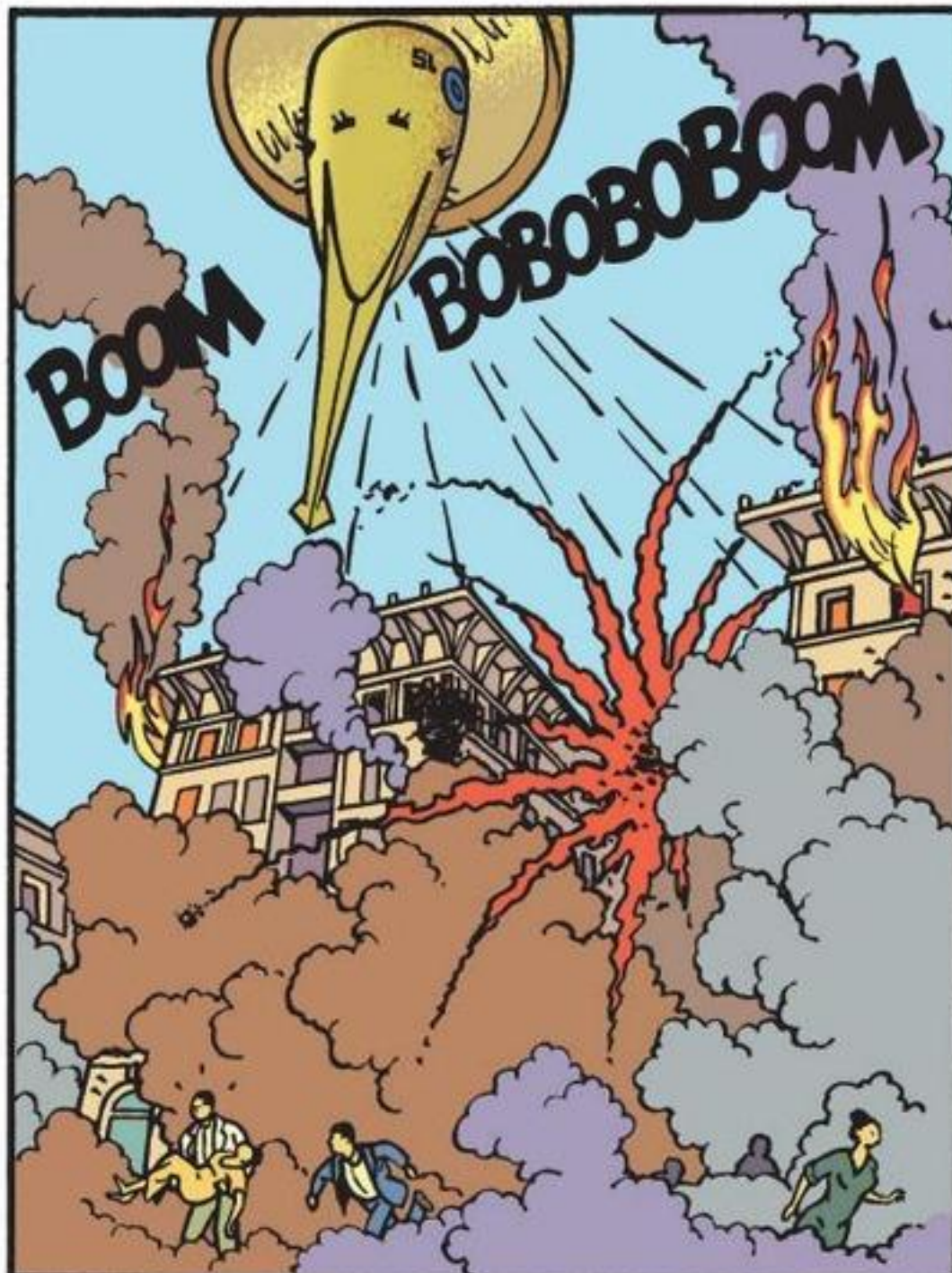


Look! Aren't we already there? ...

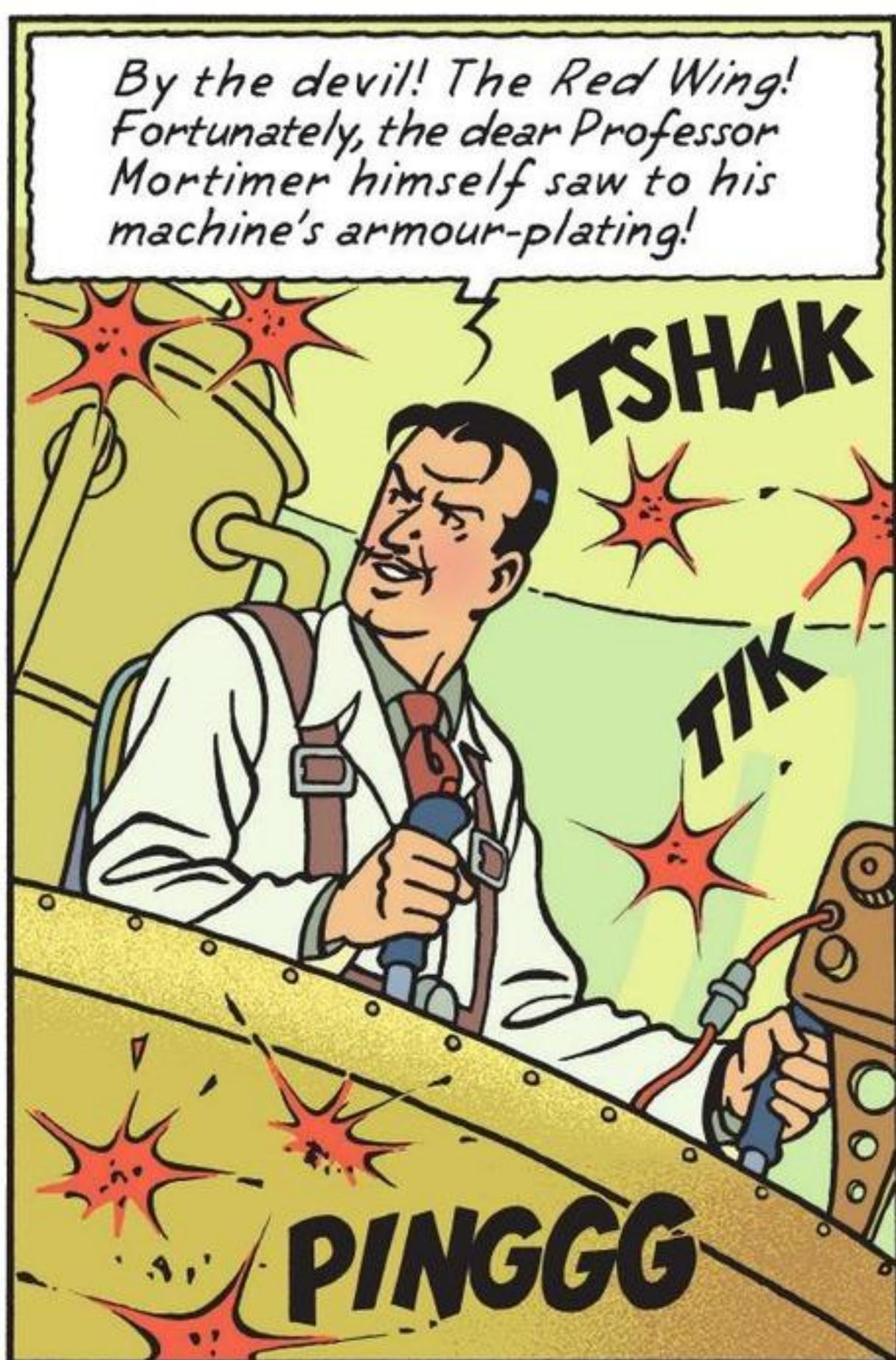
Yes, that's Hong Kong! Wait ... Am I crazy, or ... ?!



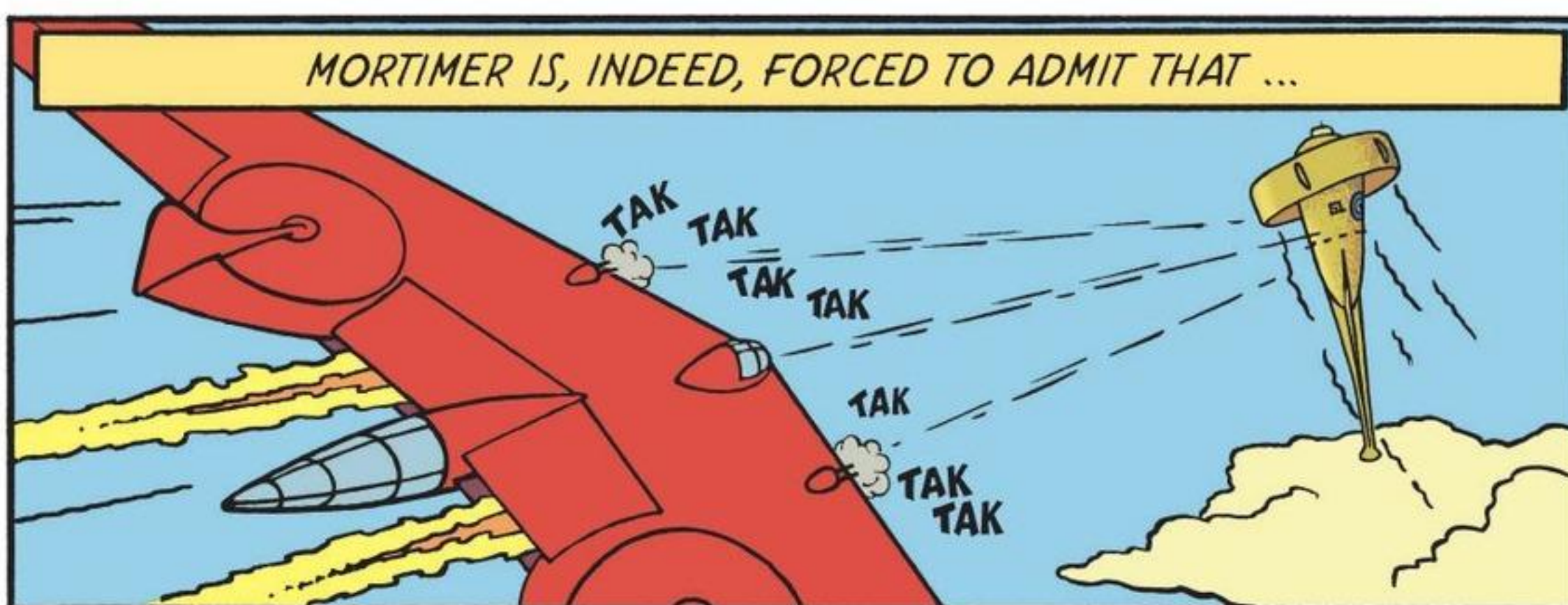
NO, THE PROFESSOR ISN'T CRAZY. WHAT HE SEES IS, INDEED, HIS OWN INVENTION, APPARENTLY HOVERING OVER THE KOWLOON PENINSULA ...



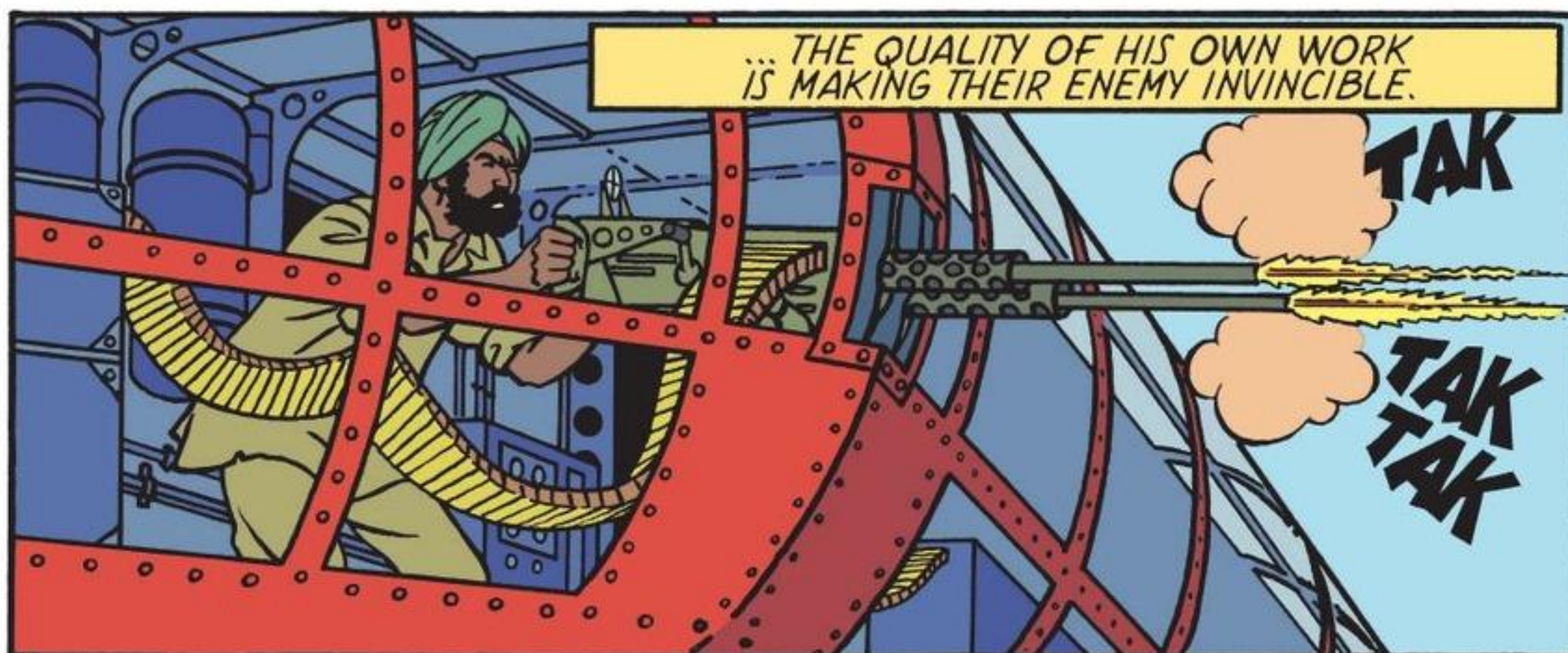
RELIEVED THAT MORTIMER HAD THE FORETHOUGHT TO ASK CAPTAIN PIANG TO RELOAD THE RED WING'S MACHINE GUNS, BLAKE GIVES THE ORDER TO ATTACK - WITHOUT BOTHERING WITH A WARNING.



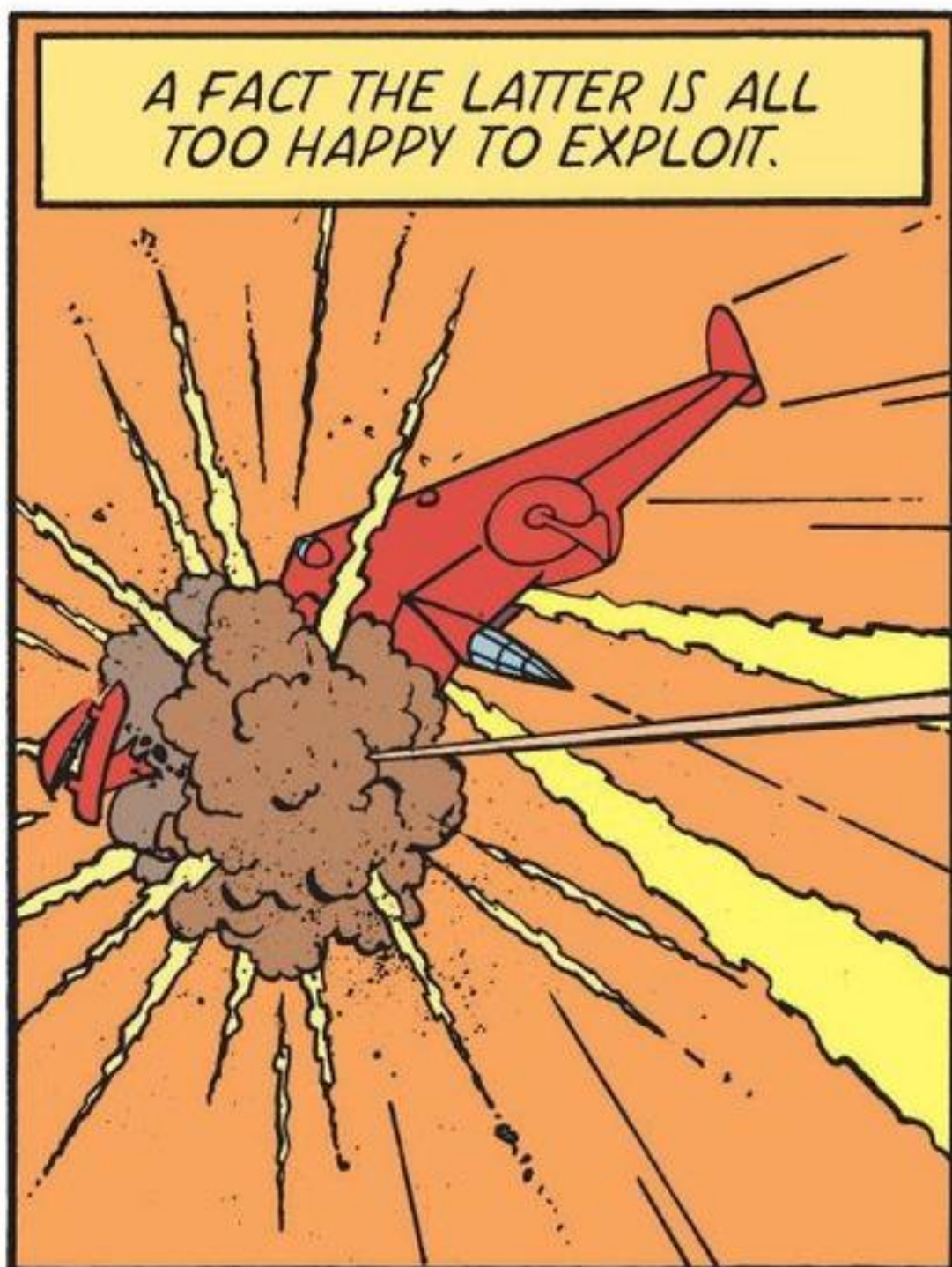
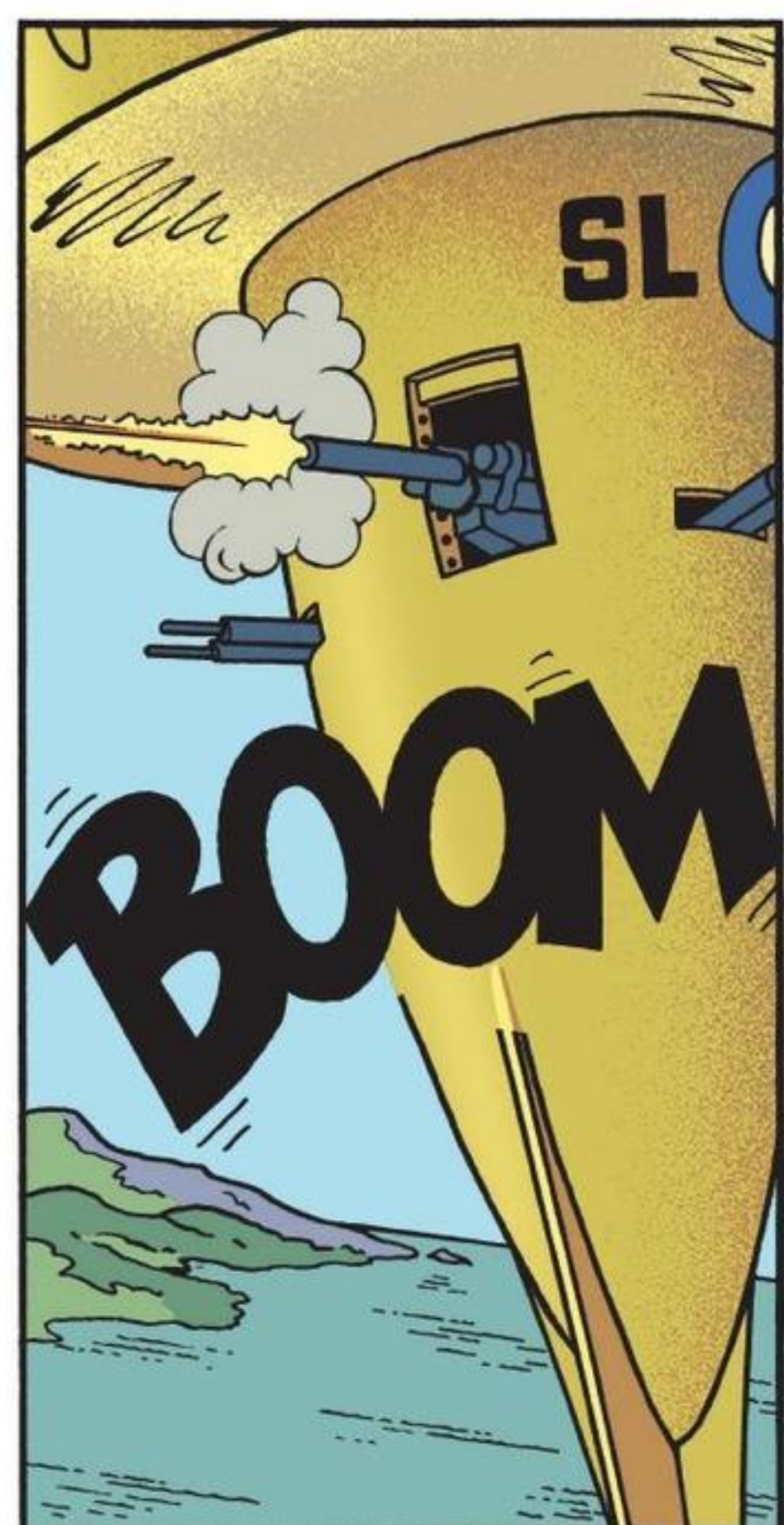
By the devil! The Red Wing! Fortunately, the dear Professor Mortimer himself saw to his machine's armour-plating!



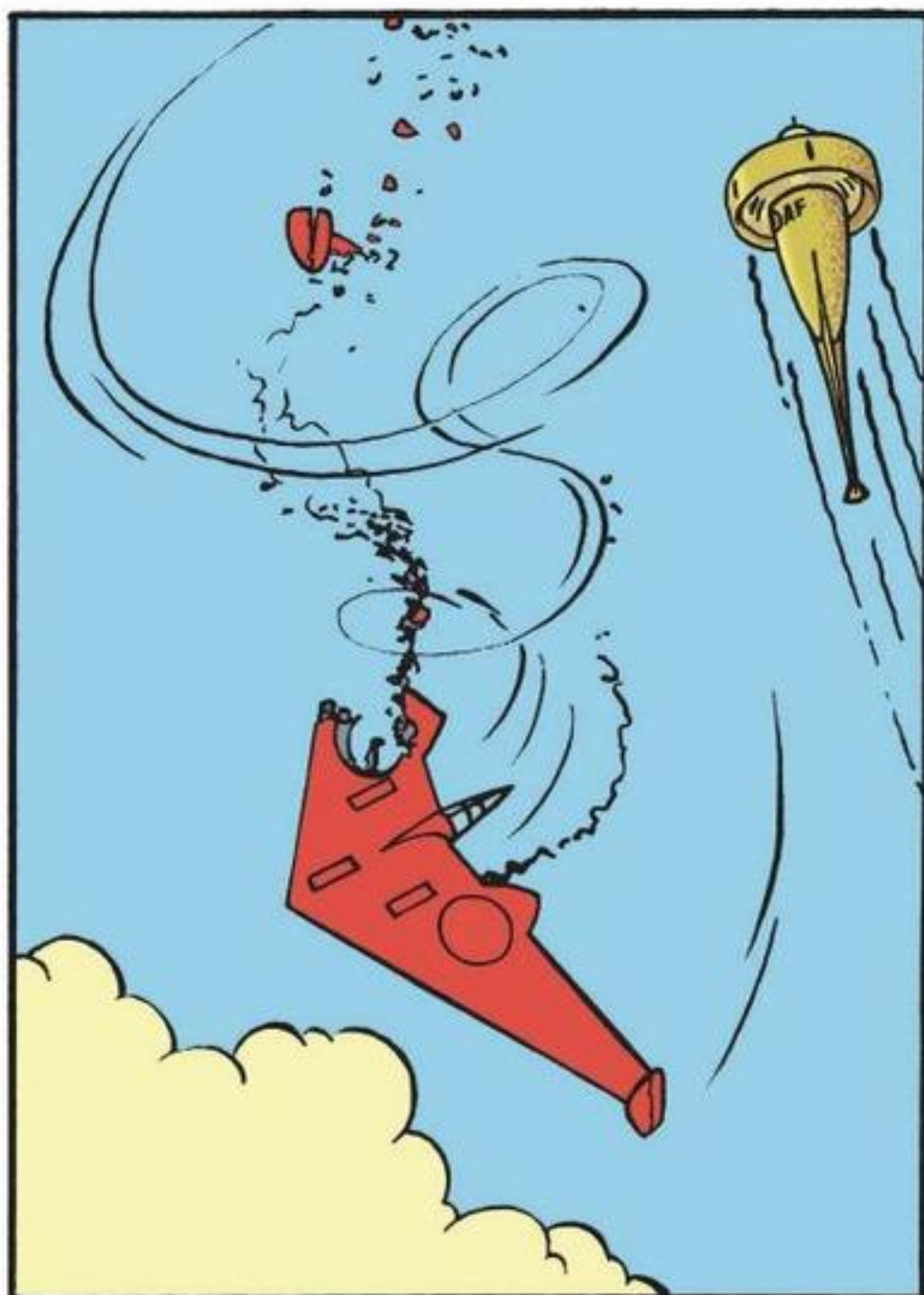
MORTIMER IS, INDEED, FORCED TO ADMIT THAT ...



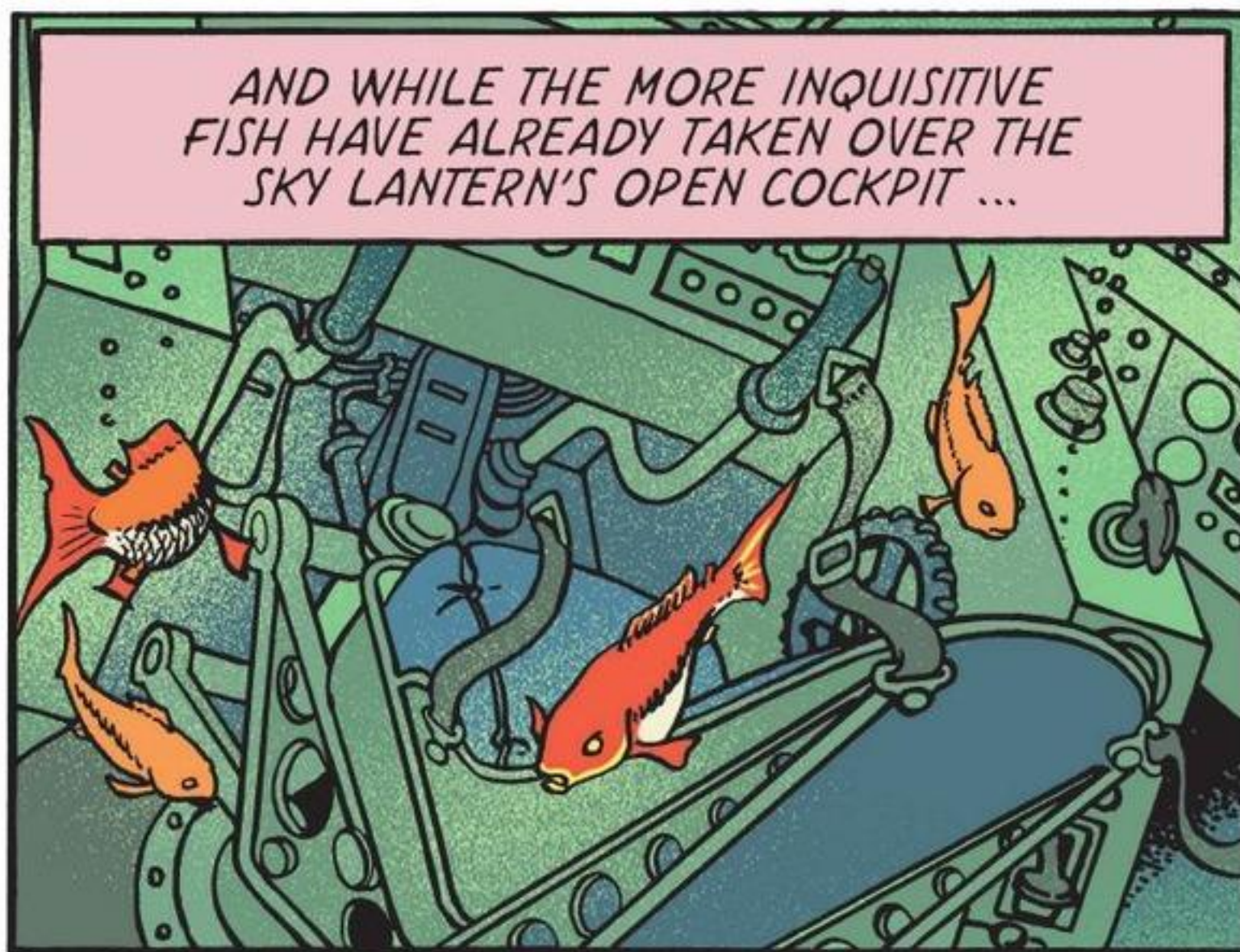
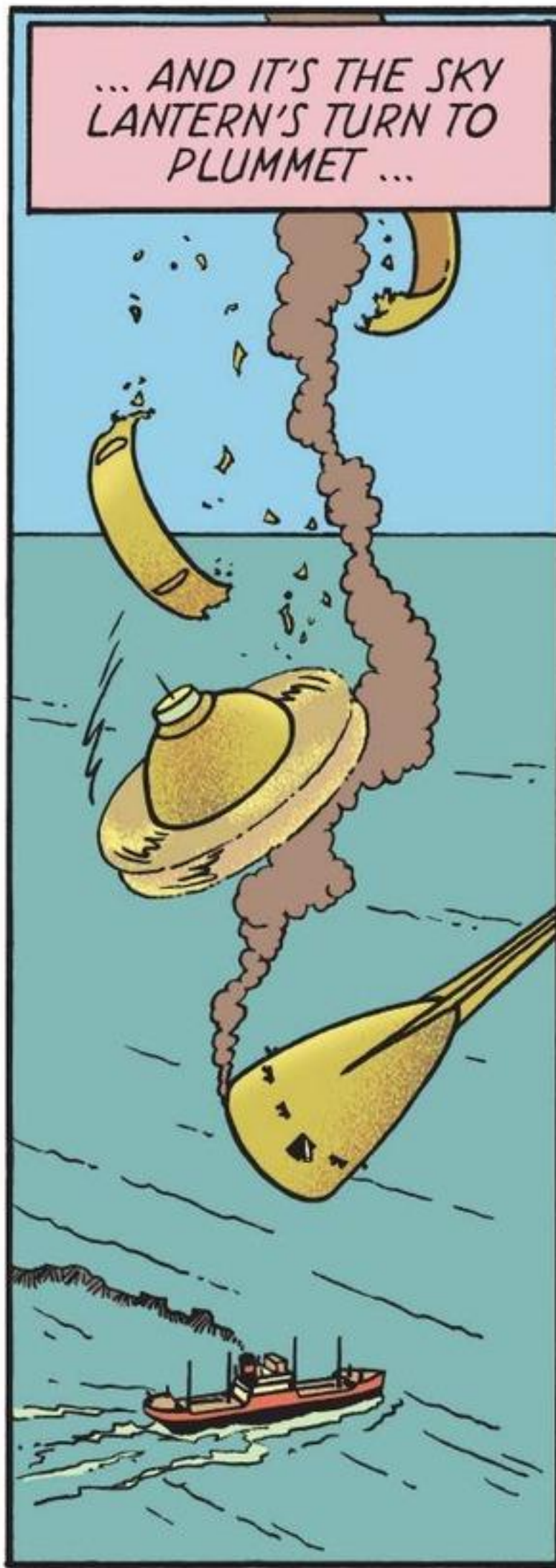
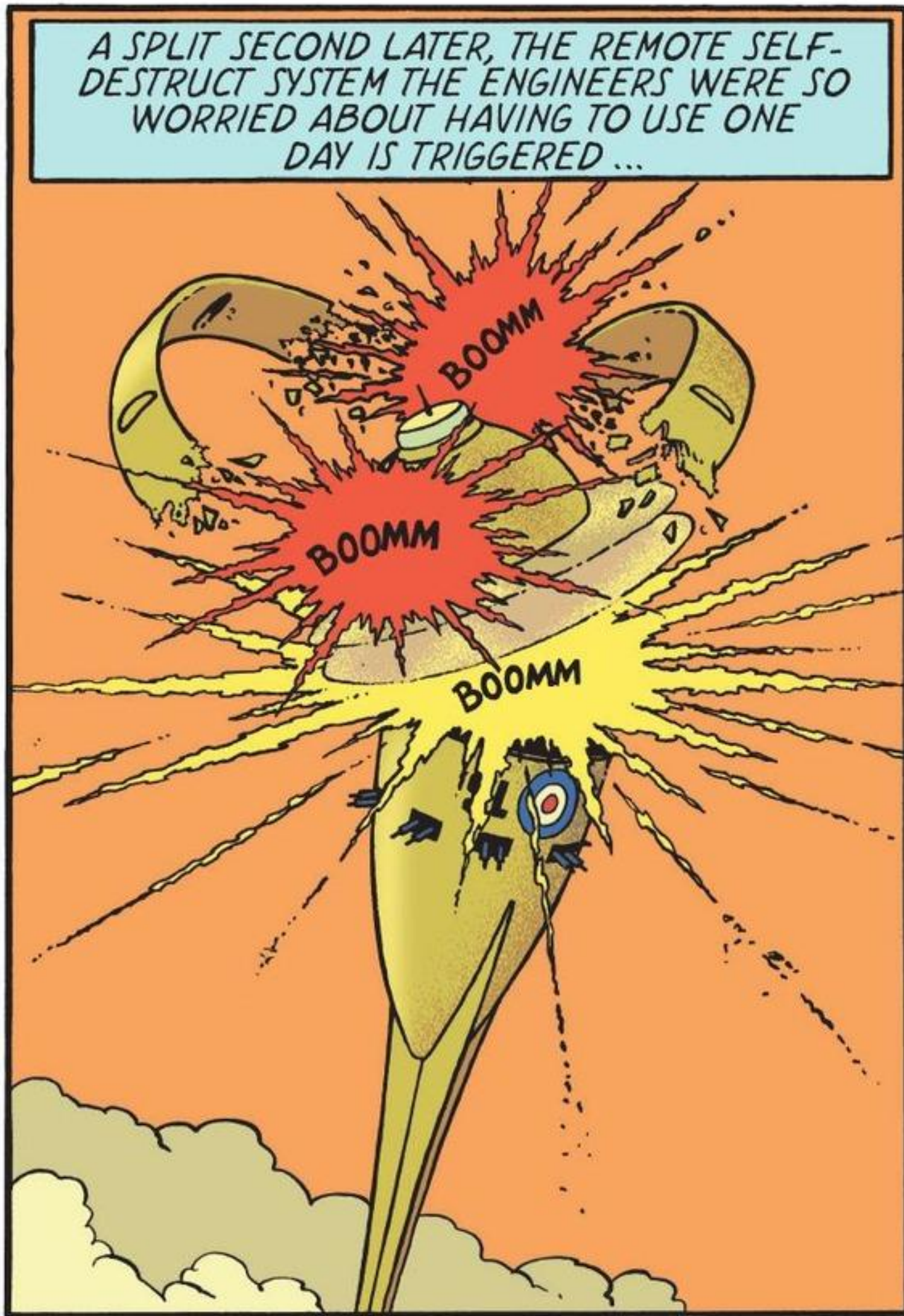
THE QUALITY OF HIS OWN WORK IS MAKING THEIR ENEMY INVINCIBLE.

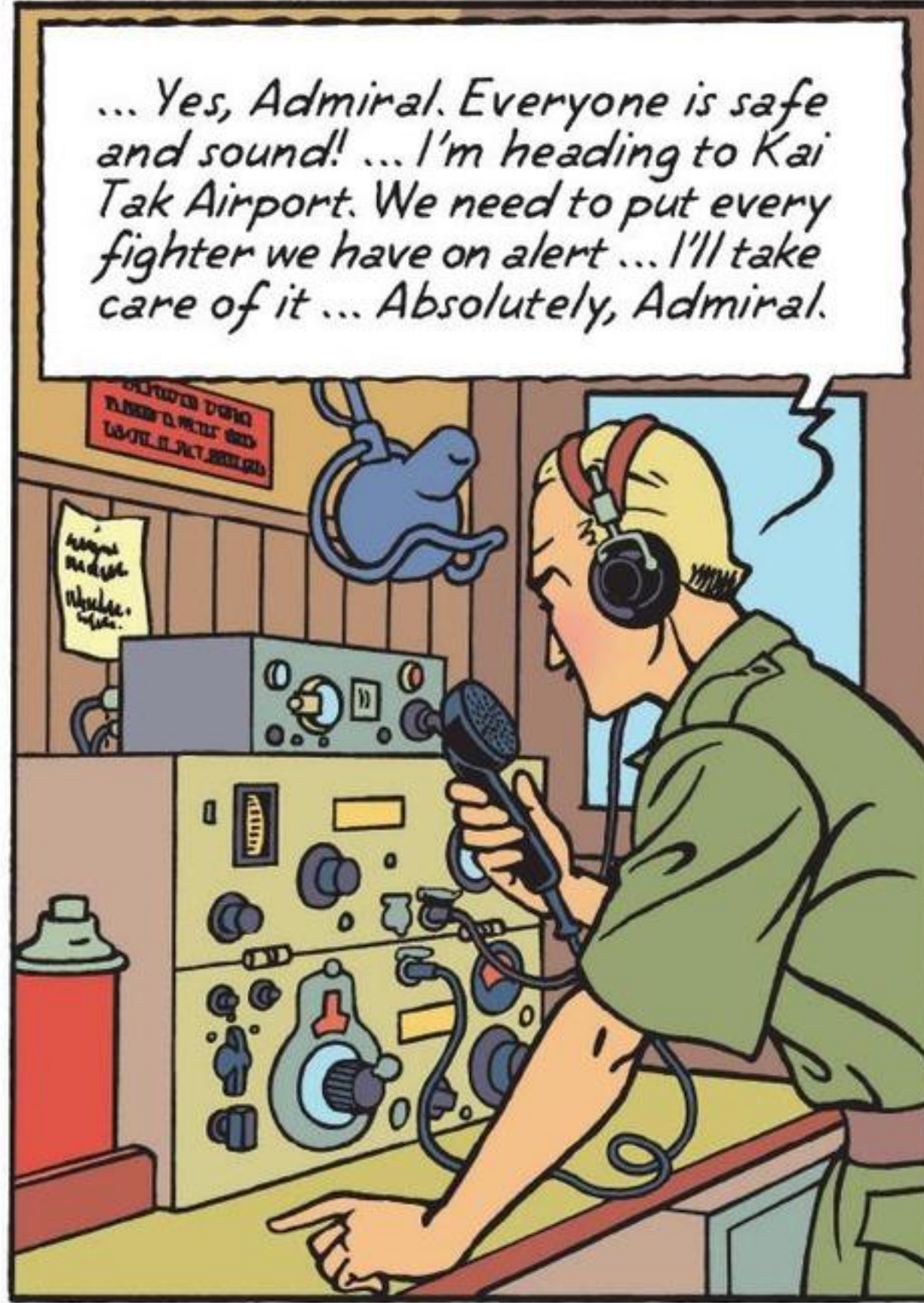
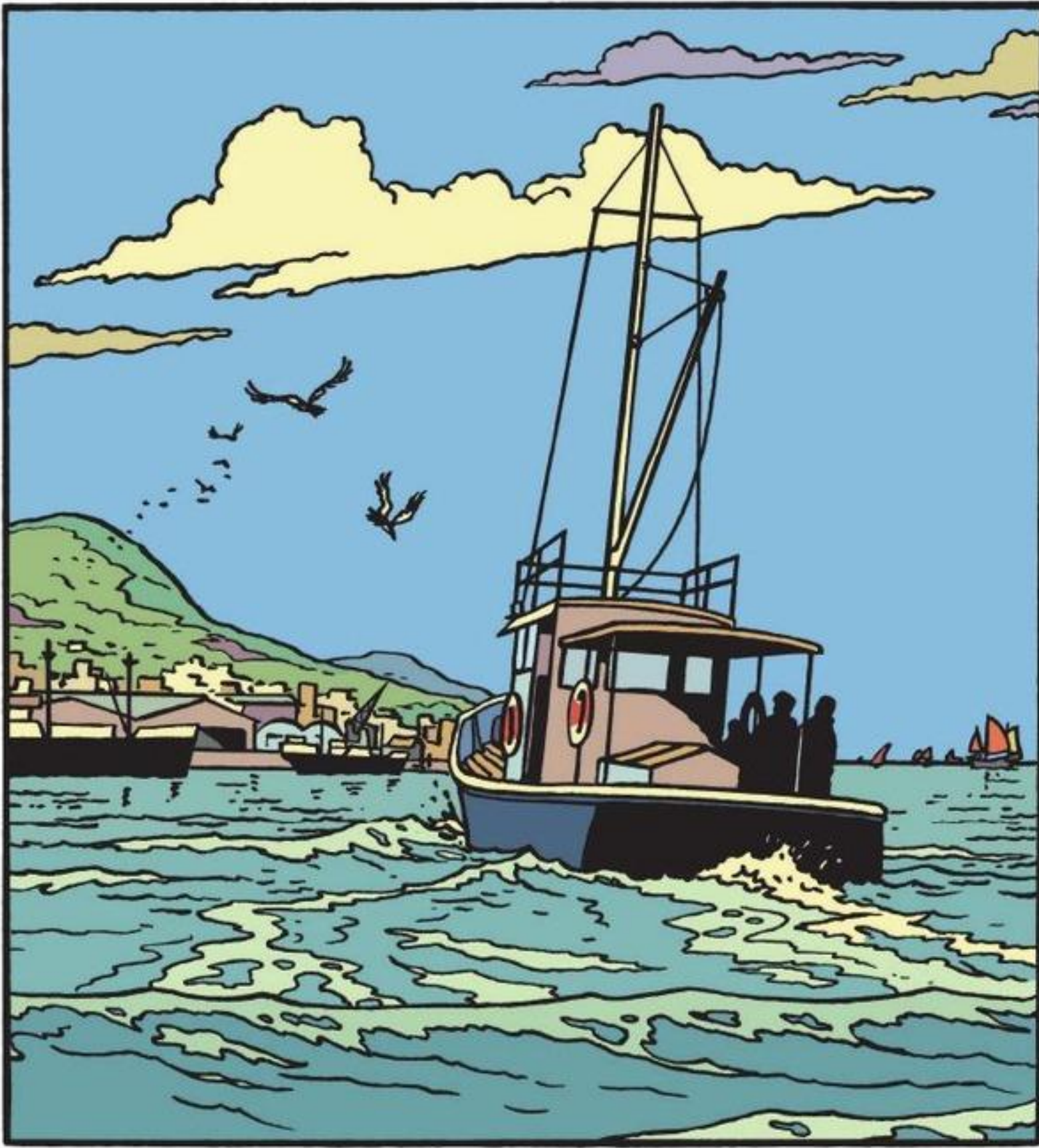


A FACT THE LATTER IS ALL TOO HAPPY TO EXPLOIT.



Holy smokes! That villain managed to hit the Red Wing! It crashed ... Push the button, Hawkyn! Now!





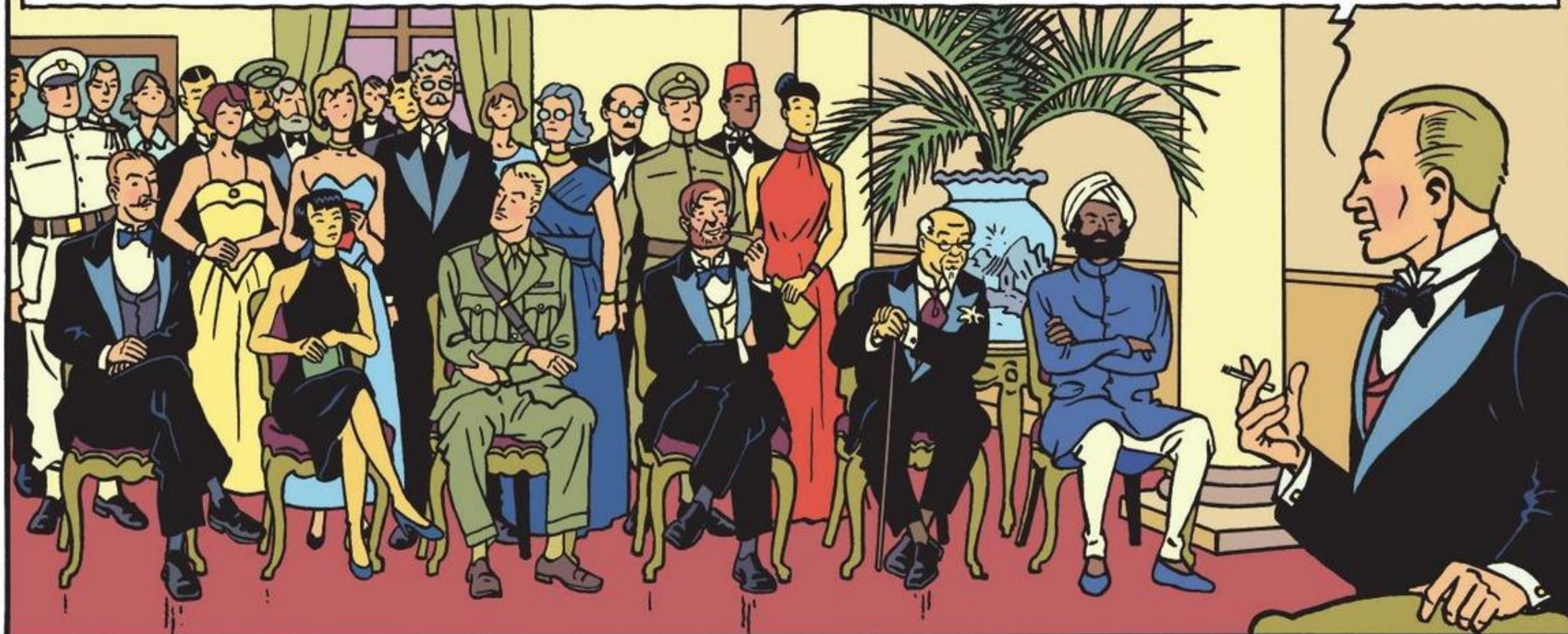
The captain is right, Professor. As for me, I owe my life to your courage!



THE NEXT EVENING, IN GOVERNOR GRANTHAM'S RESIDENCE...



... And in the name of the Prime Minister and his government, I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to our military forces and all of Hong Kong's supporting civilian infrastructure for their efforts in saving our beautiful and proud 'British Pearl of Asia'!



I just heard that the Intelligence Service had recalled you to London. No doubt to offer you a promotion! Congratulations, Captain!

Thank you, Admiral. I shall endeavour to prove worthy of my superiors' trust.



Why such a long face on this day of celebration, Professor? My deputy Tung Pao is back on his feet and will soon be back in China. All's well that ends well, isn't it?

Except when it comes to Shao's priceless document. I'm still kicking myself for not managing to save it.



Consider this in the light of the law of eternal balance that represent Yin and Yang. To every negative thing, there is a positive counter. We know what happened in China almost 22 centuries ago, and that is precious. We'll find other material evidence someday, I'm sure.

You are a wise man, Doctor.



By the way, Captain, have your services figured out who was hiding behind the latex mask that was recovered from the cockpit of the Sky Lantern?

No. I doubt we ever will, either, since our divers observed that the aircraft's survival equipment had disappeared.



Well, at any rate ... thank you for your help. I don't know what will become of my country, but ... I won't forget what you did for us.

The men and women who toil in the shadows rarely get to make policies, Miss T'i. Whatever happens, though, I wish you good luck too.



Mortimer, over here! Dr Sun Sun-i would like to add a word ...



... And that's why I'm convinced that it won't be long before Shih-huang-ti's tomb is found. Let's hope that the revelation of such a glorious common past will help all Chinese people, whether Nationalists or Communists, to find peace with each other through communion with their ancestors!



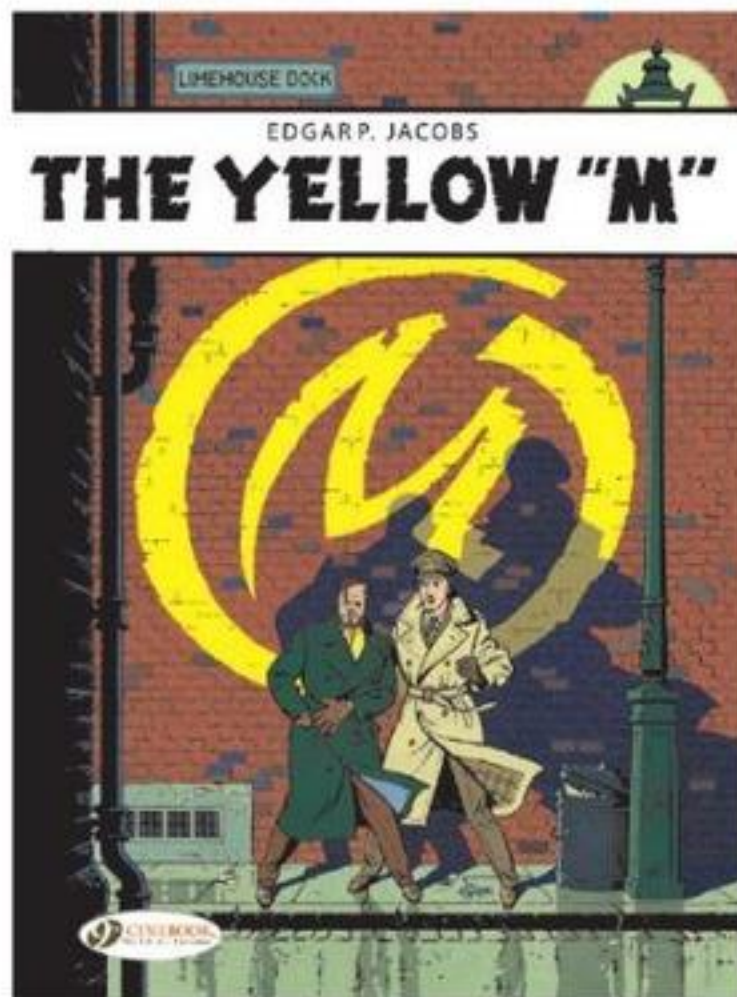
THE



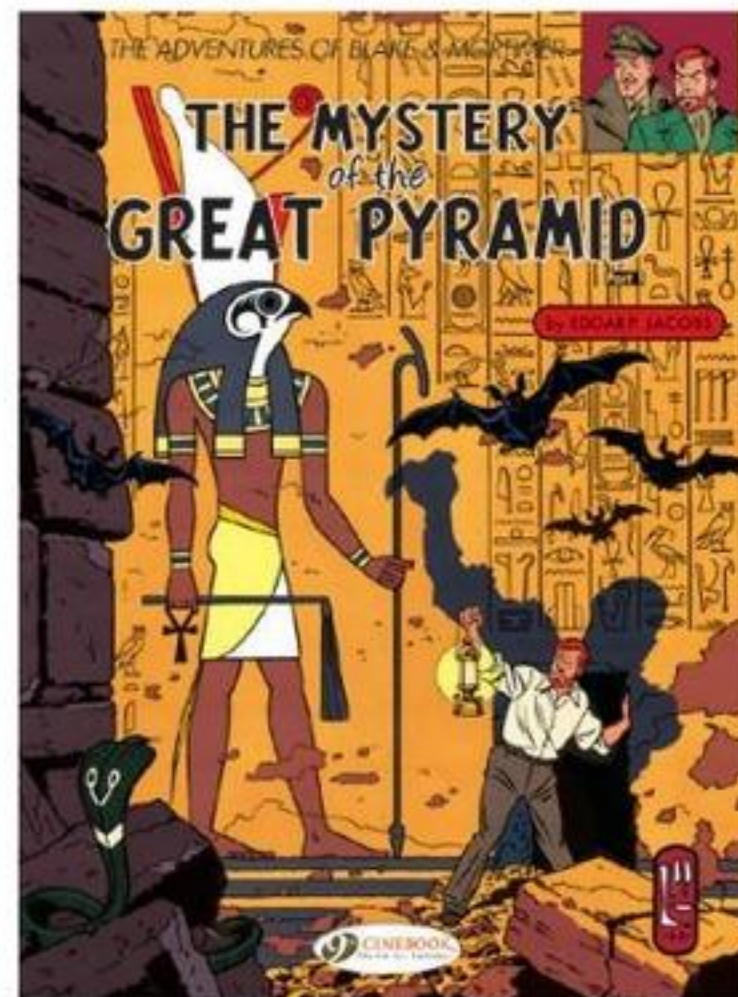
END

Yves Sente
TEUW BERSERIK
Van Dongen

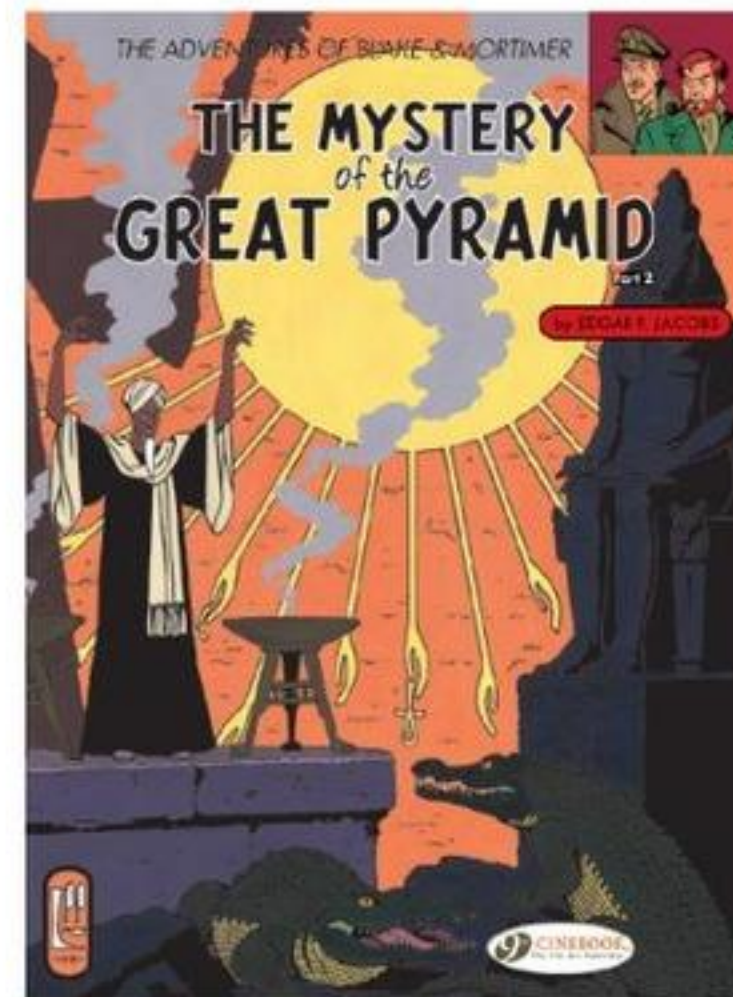
THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



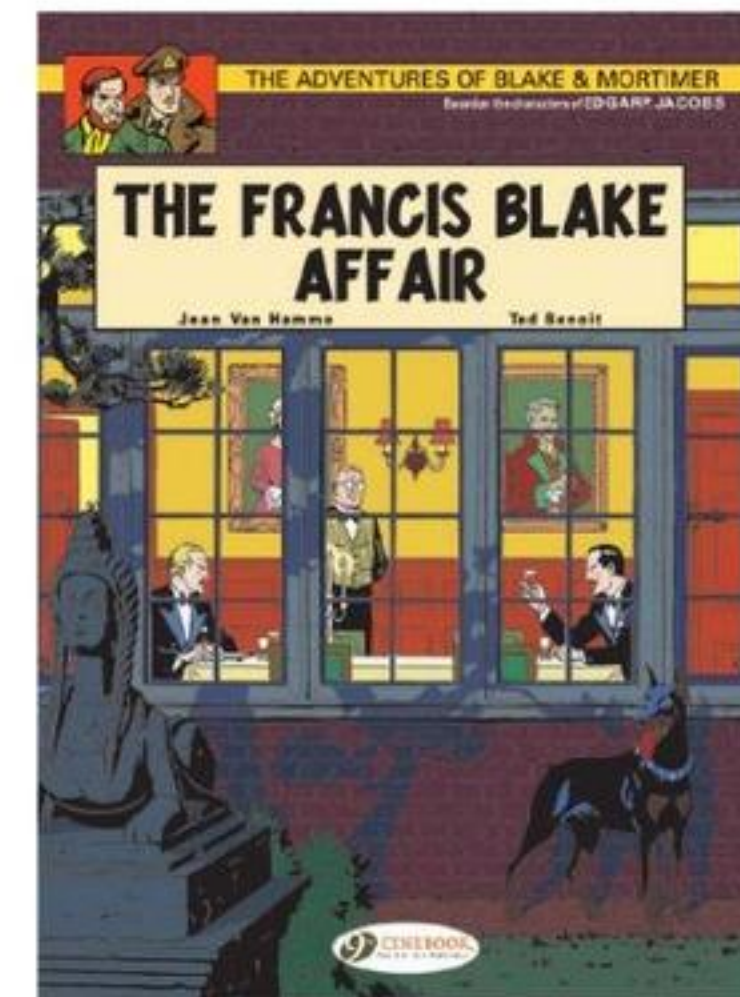
1-The Yellow "M"
EDGAR P. JACOBS



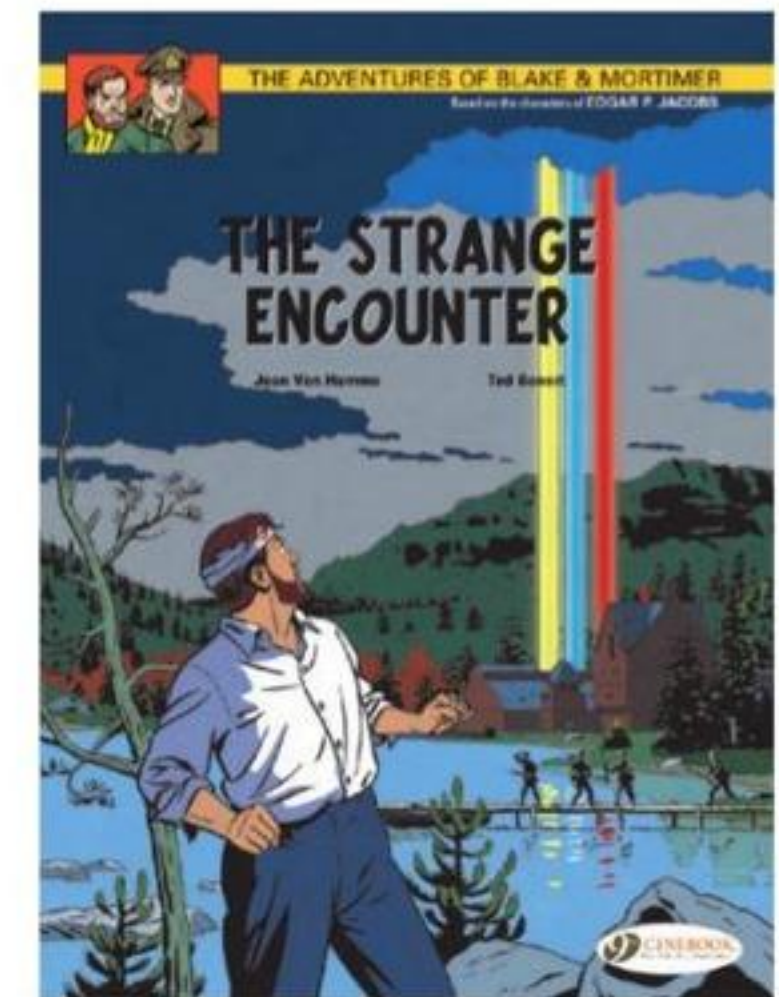
2-The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



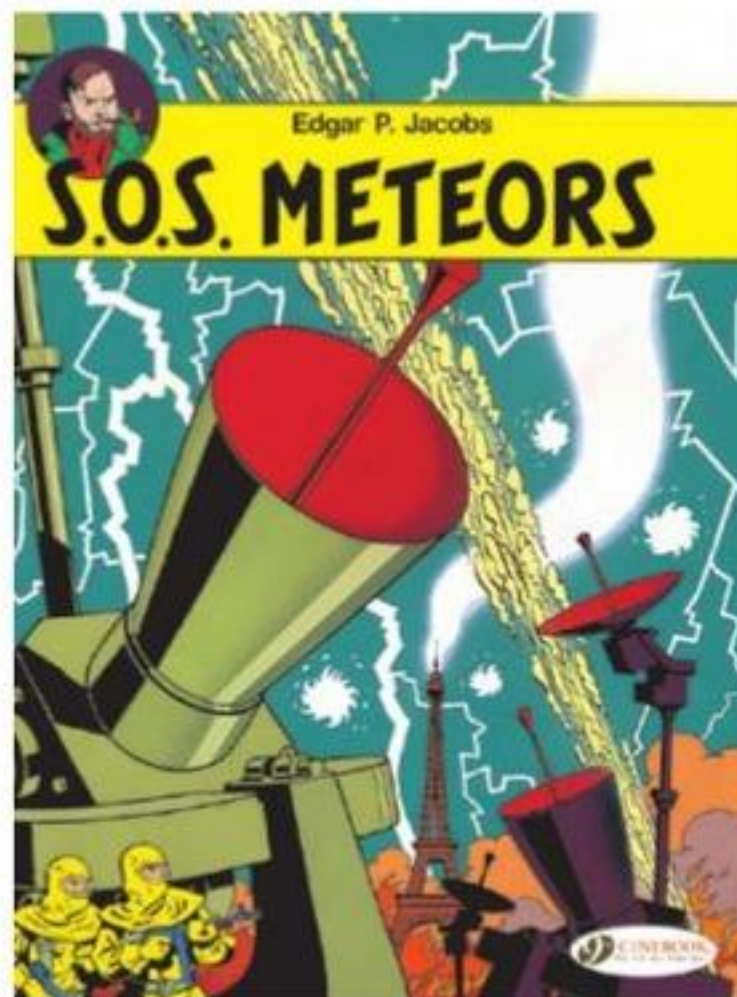
3-The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



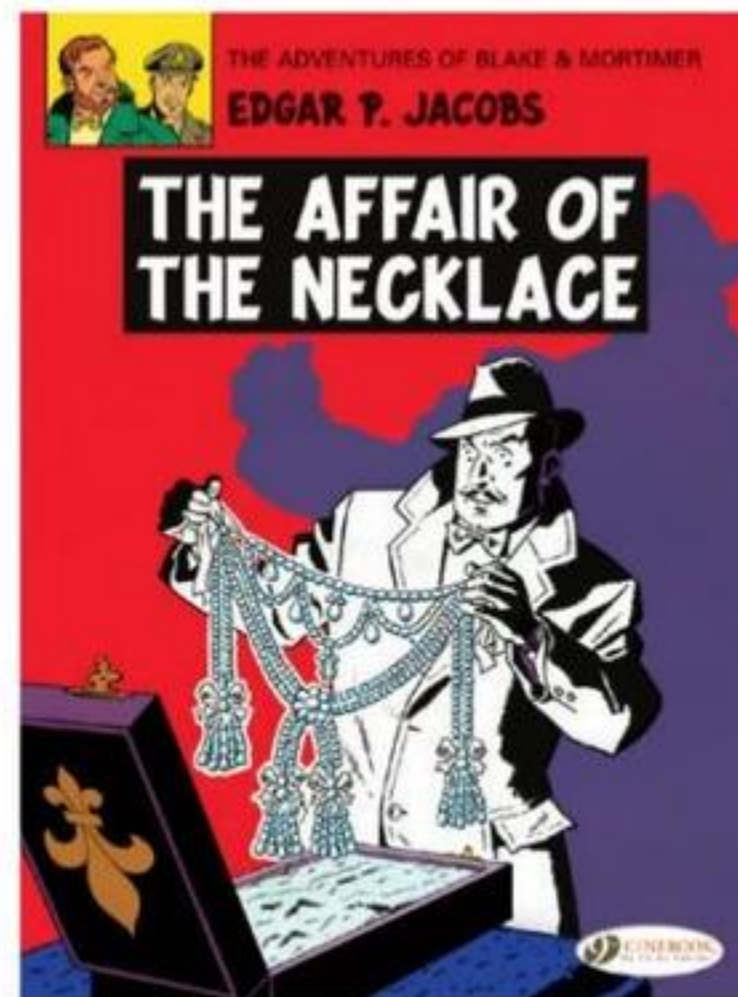
4-The Francis Blake Affair
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



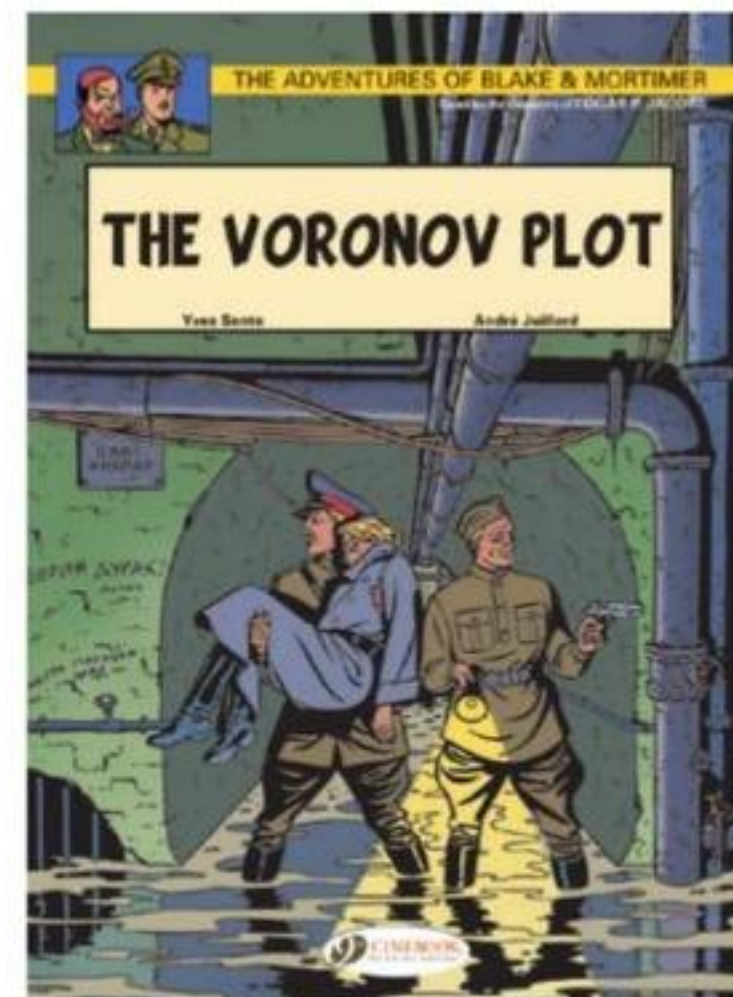
5-The Strange Encounter
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



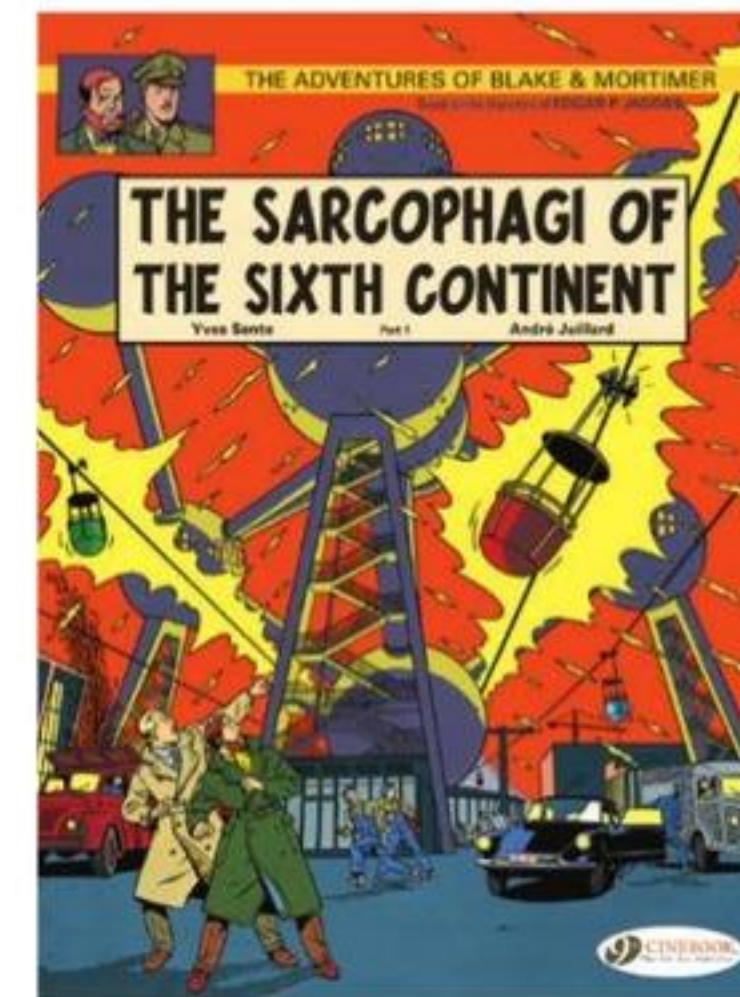
6-S.O.S. Meteors
EDGAR P. JACOBS



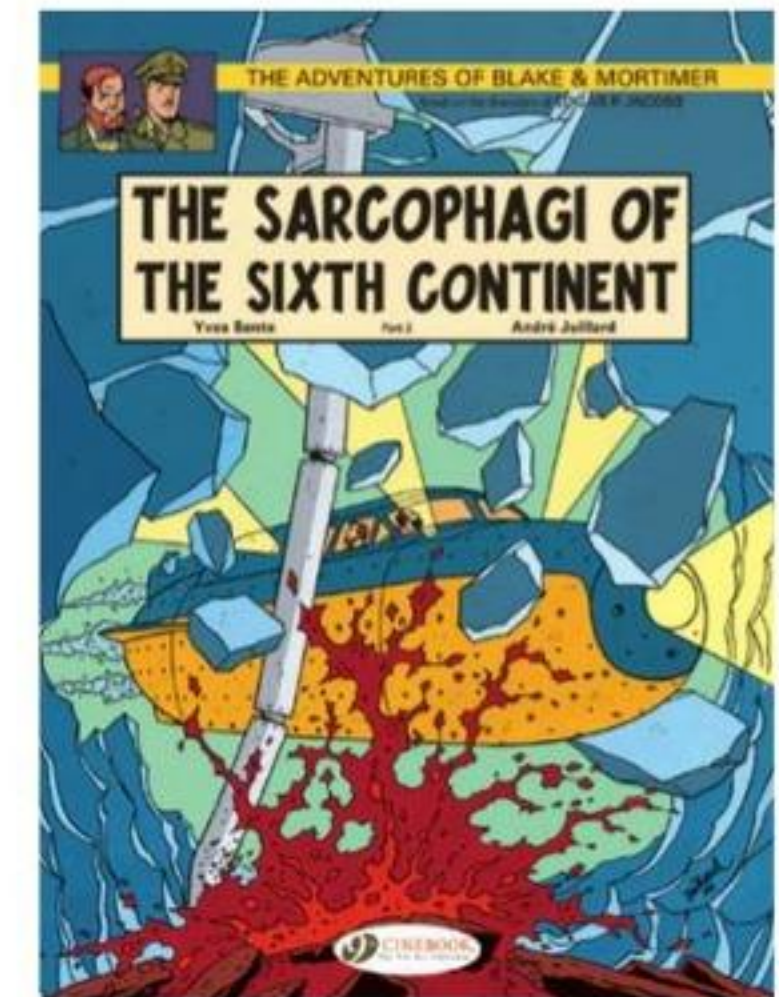
7-The Affair of the Necklace
EDGAR P. JACOBS



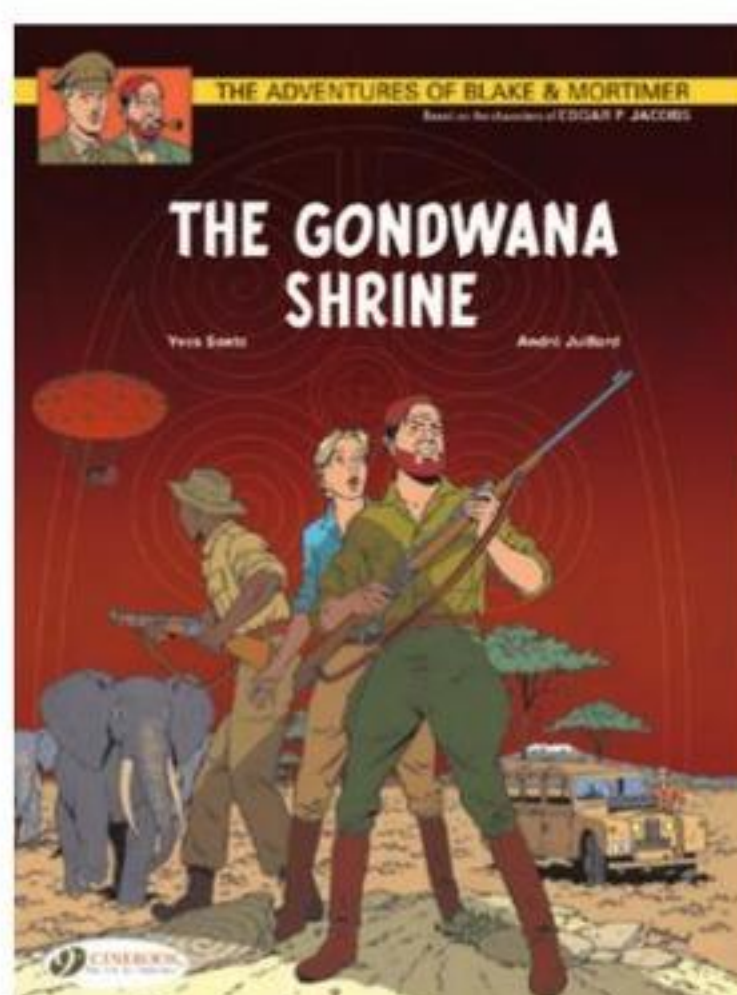
8-The Voronov Plot
SENTE - JUILLARD



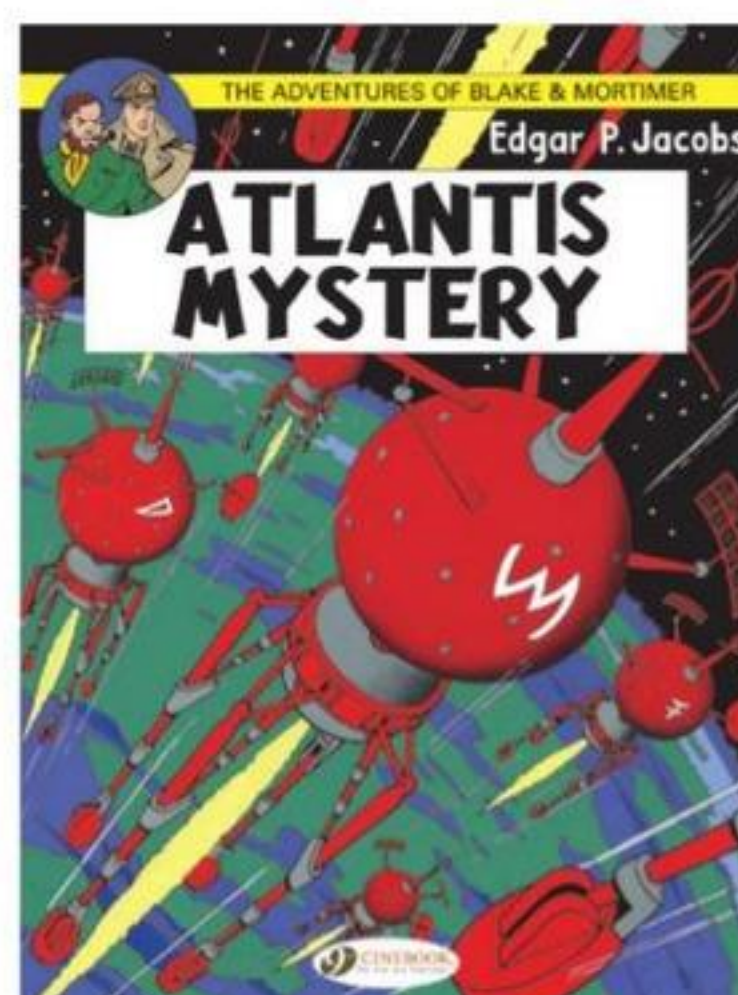
9-The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 1
SENTE - JUILLARD



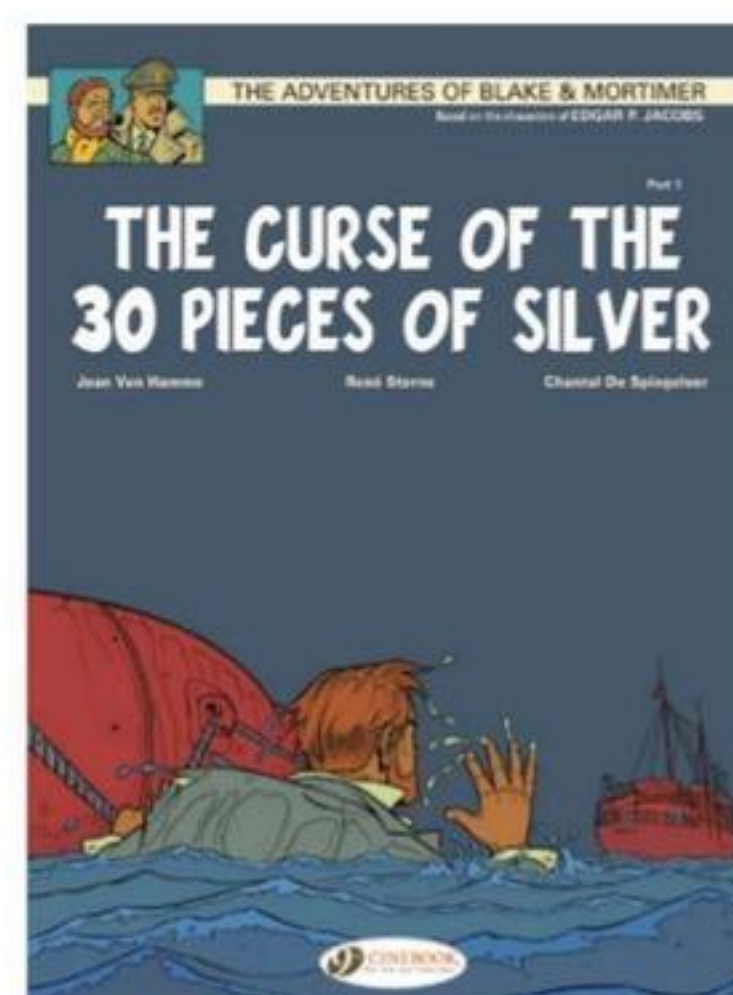
10-The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 2
SENTE - JUILLARD



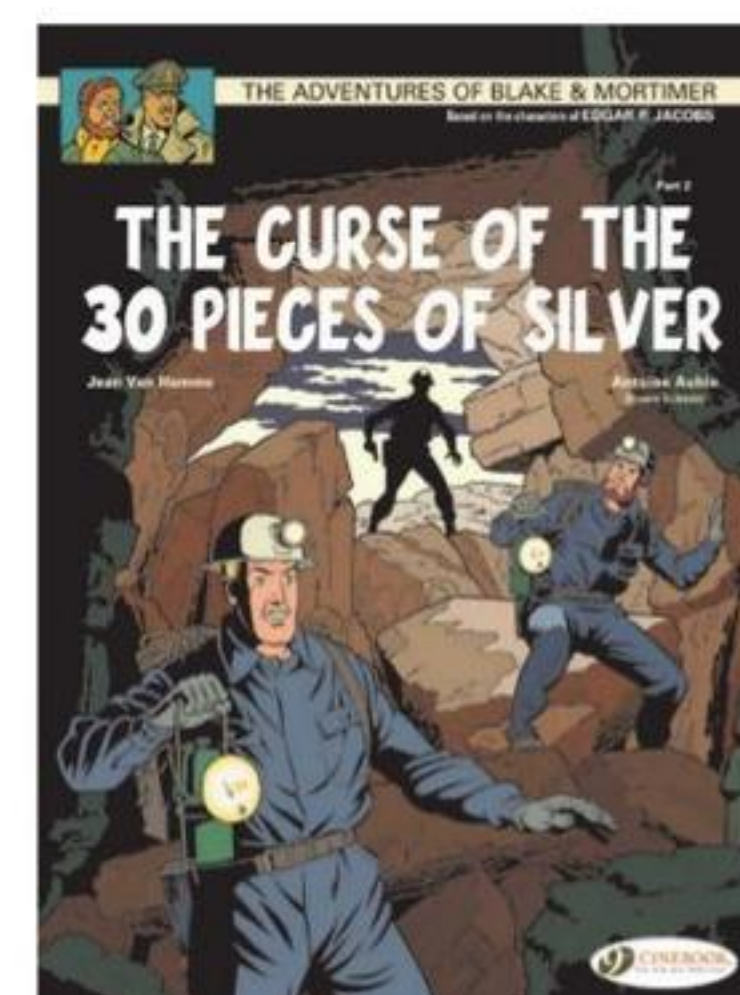
11-The Gondwana Shrine
SENTE - JUILLARD



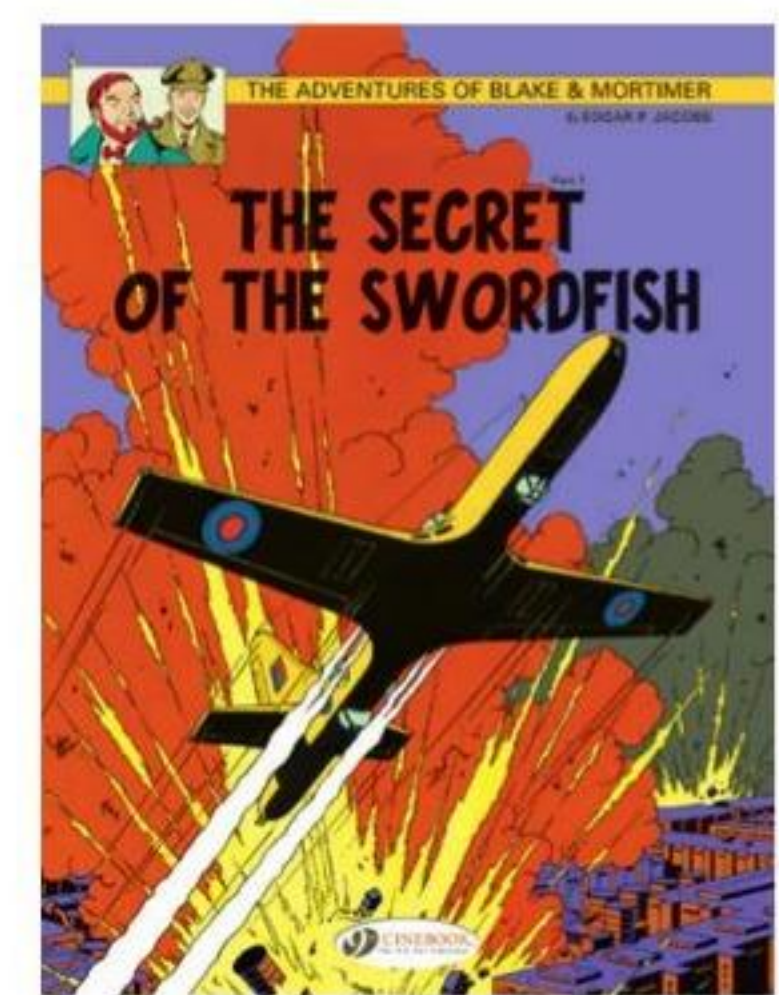
12-Atlantis Mystery
EDGAR P. JACOBS



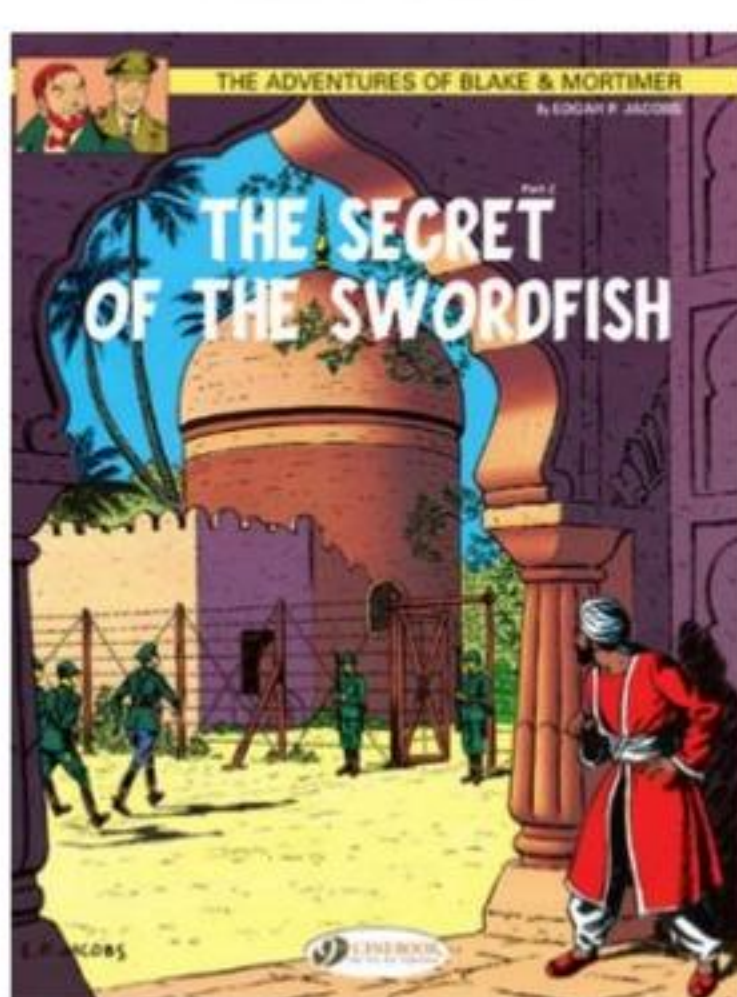
13-The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 1
VAN HAMME - STERNE - DE SPIEGELEER



14-The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 2
VAN HAMME - AUBIN - SCHRÉDER



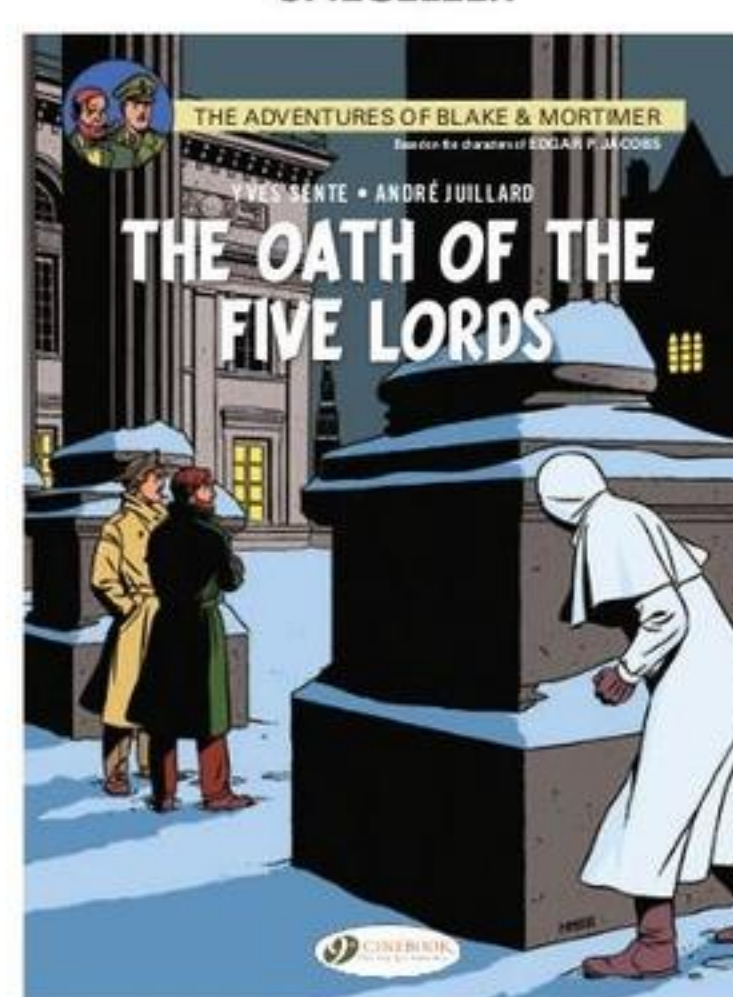
15-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



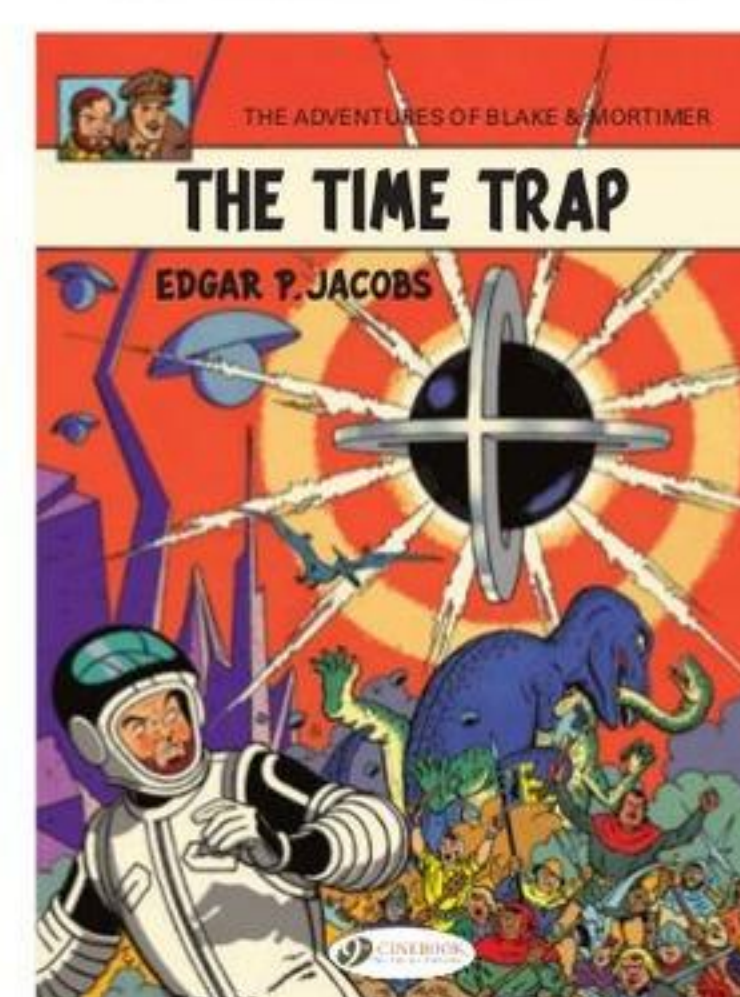
16-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



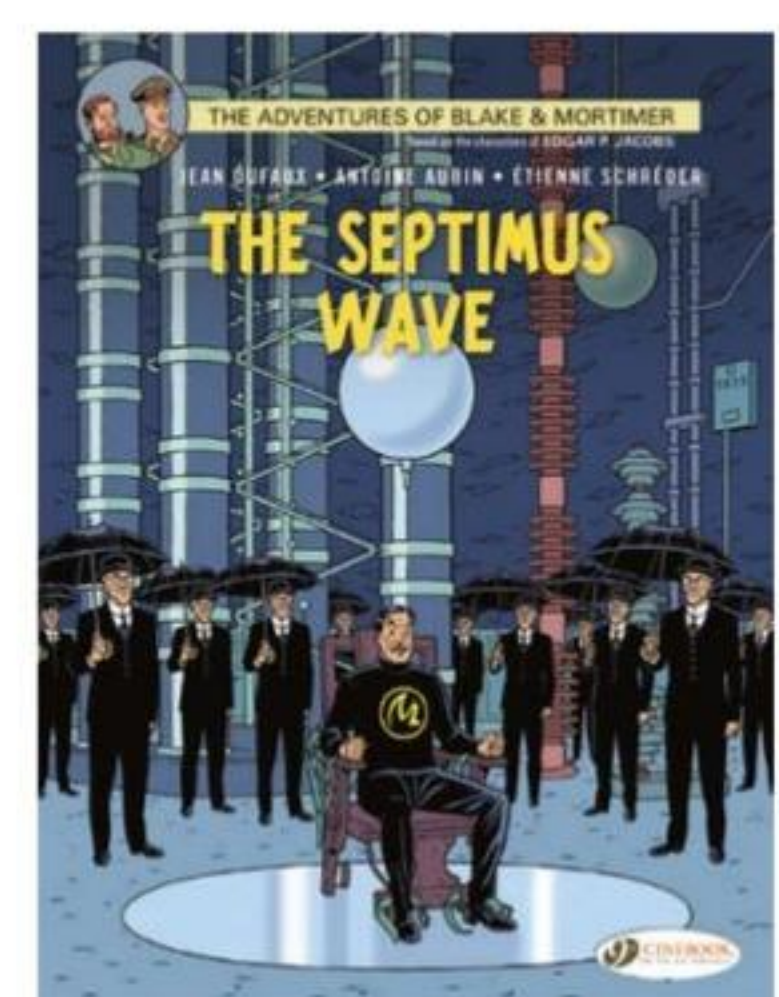
17-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 3
EDGAR P. JACOBS



18-The Oath of the Five Lords
SENTE - JUILLARD



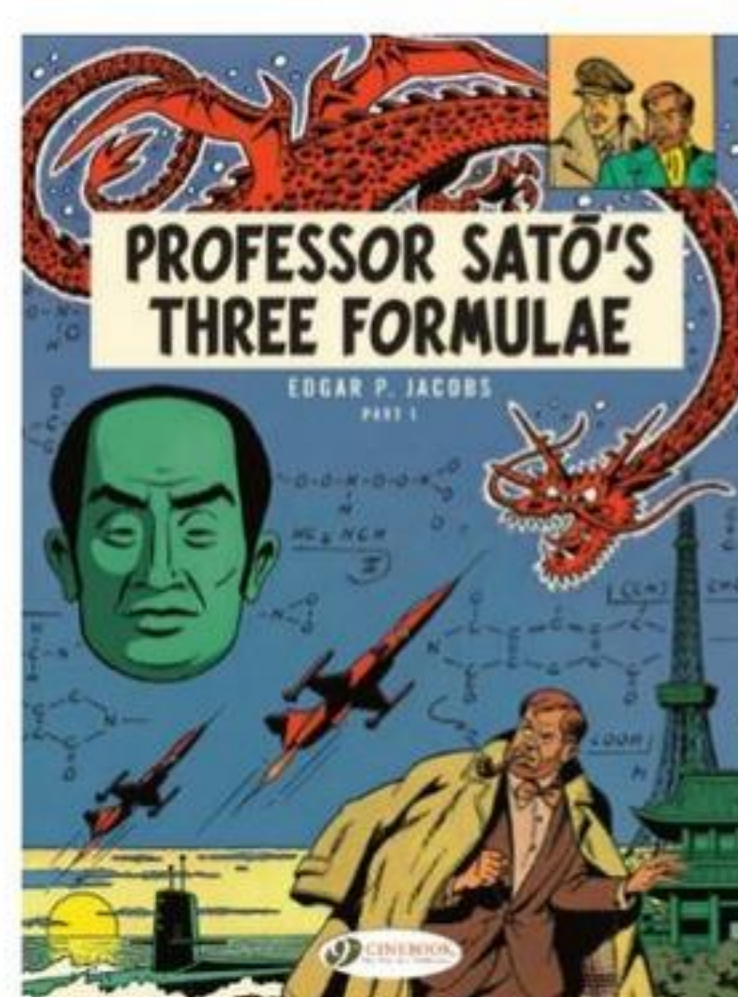
19-The Time Trap
EDGAR P. JACOBS



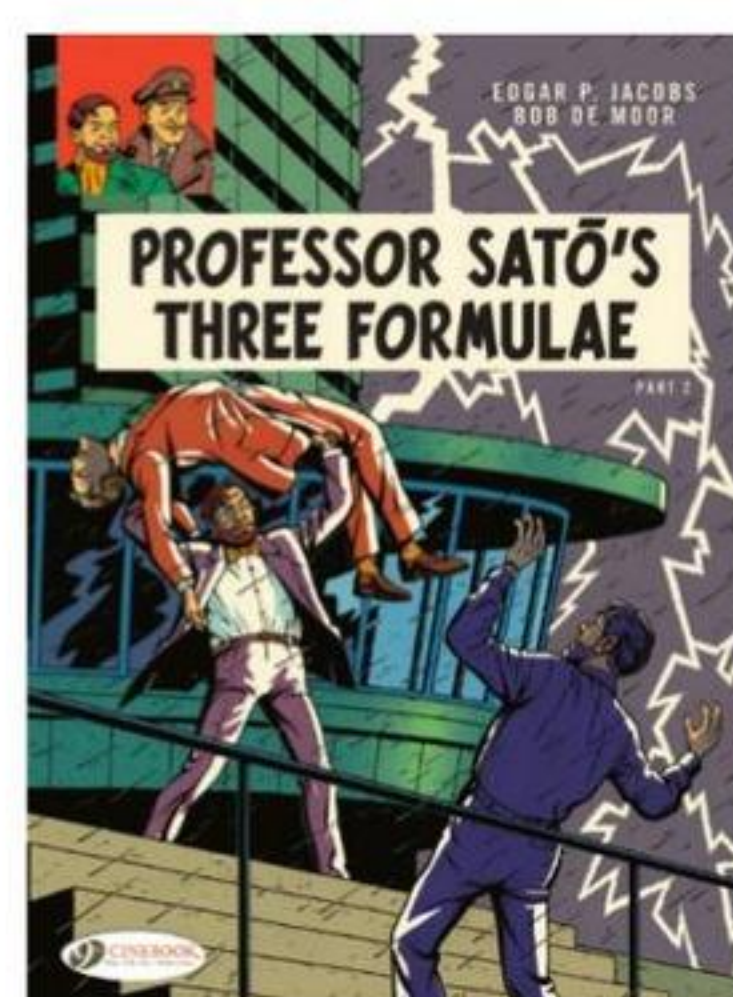
20-The Septimus Wave
DUFaux - AUBIN - SCHRÉDER



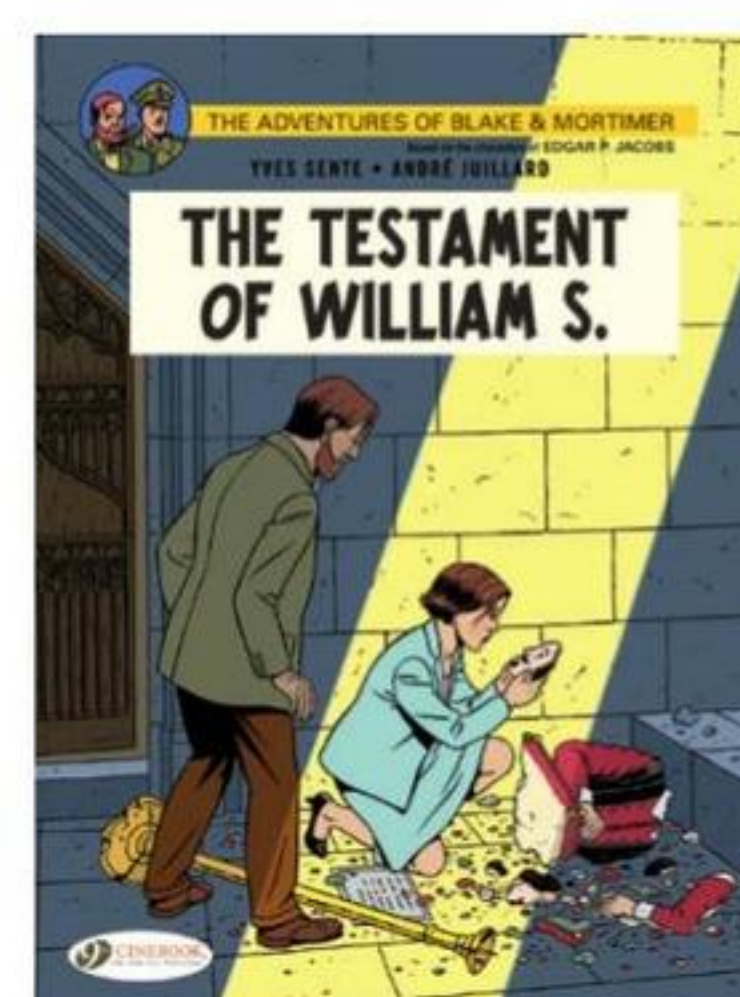
21-Plutarch's Staff
SENTE - JUILLARD



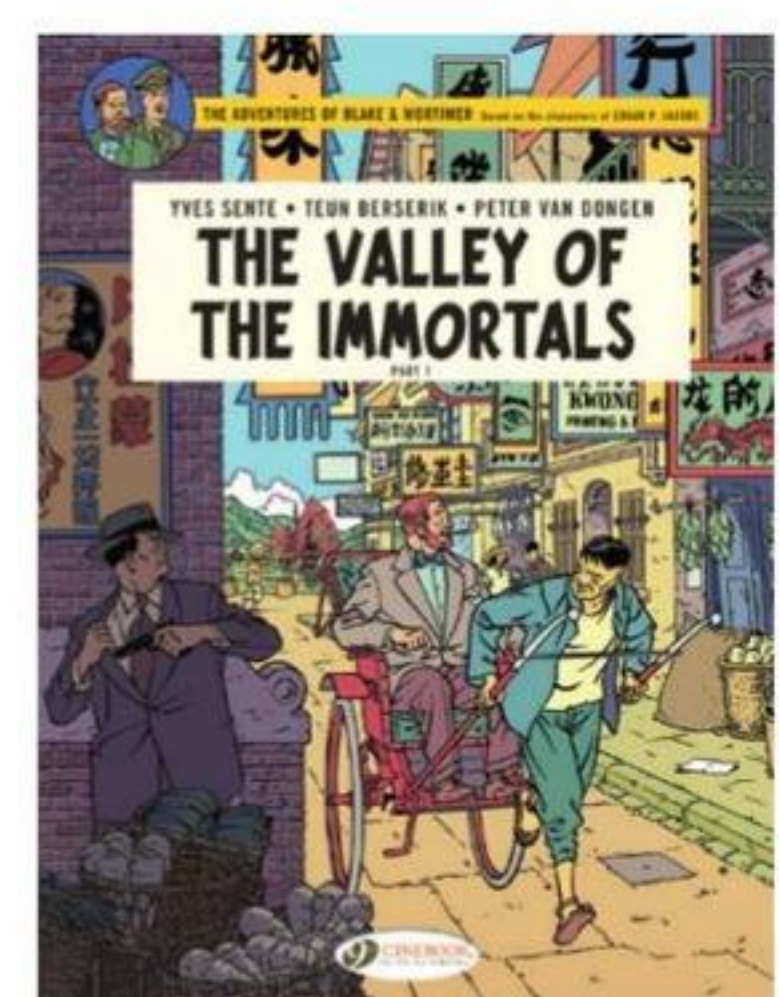
22-Professor Satō's Three Formulae
Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



23-Professor Satō's Three Formulae
Part 2
JACOBS - DE MOOR



24-The Testament of William S.
SENTE - JUILLARD



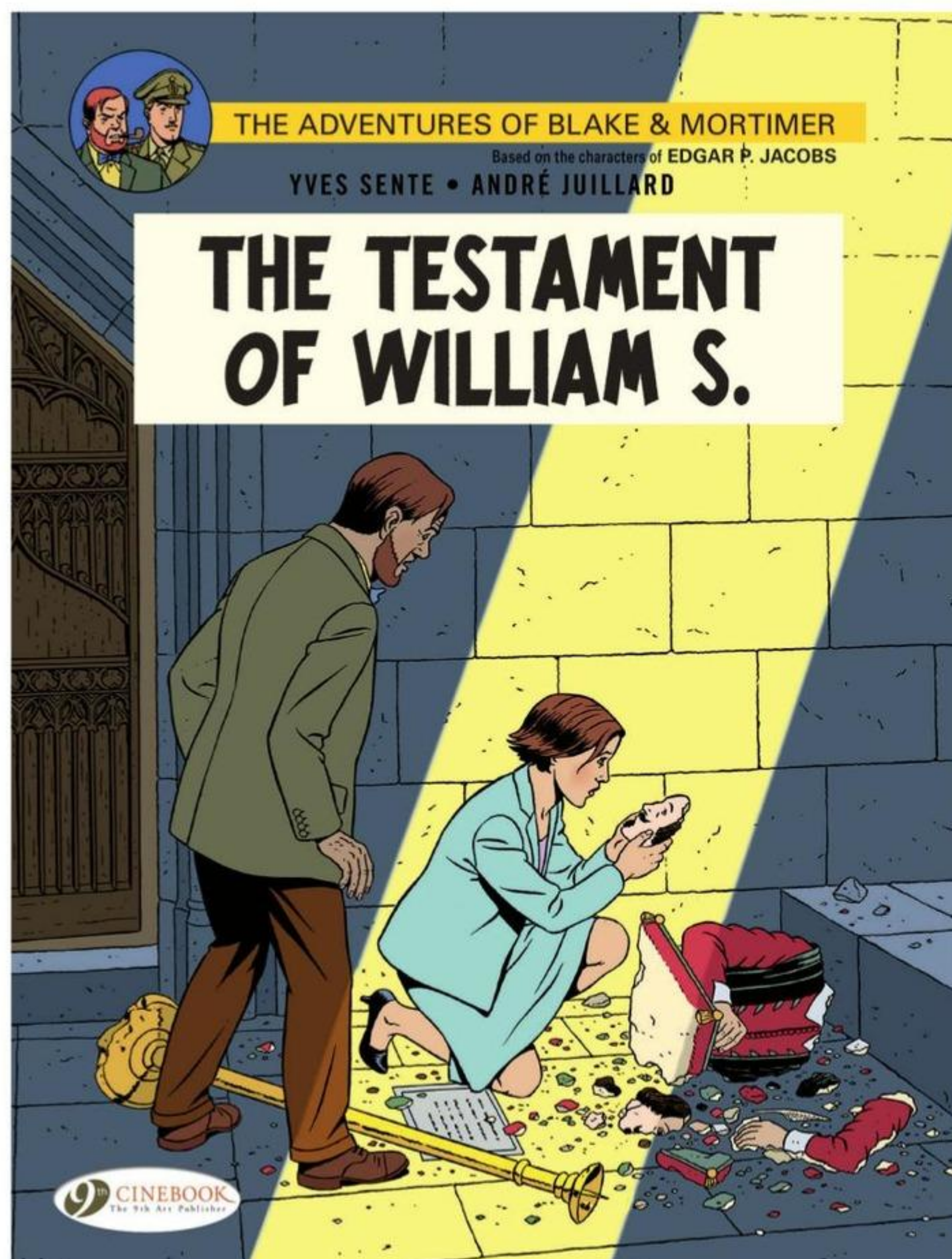
25-The Valley of the Immortals
Part 1
SENTE - BERSERIK - VAN DONGEN

THE TESTAMENT OF WILLIAM S.

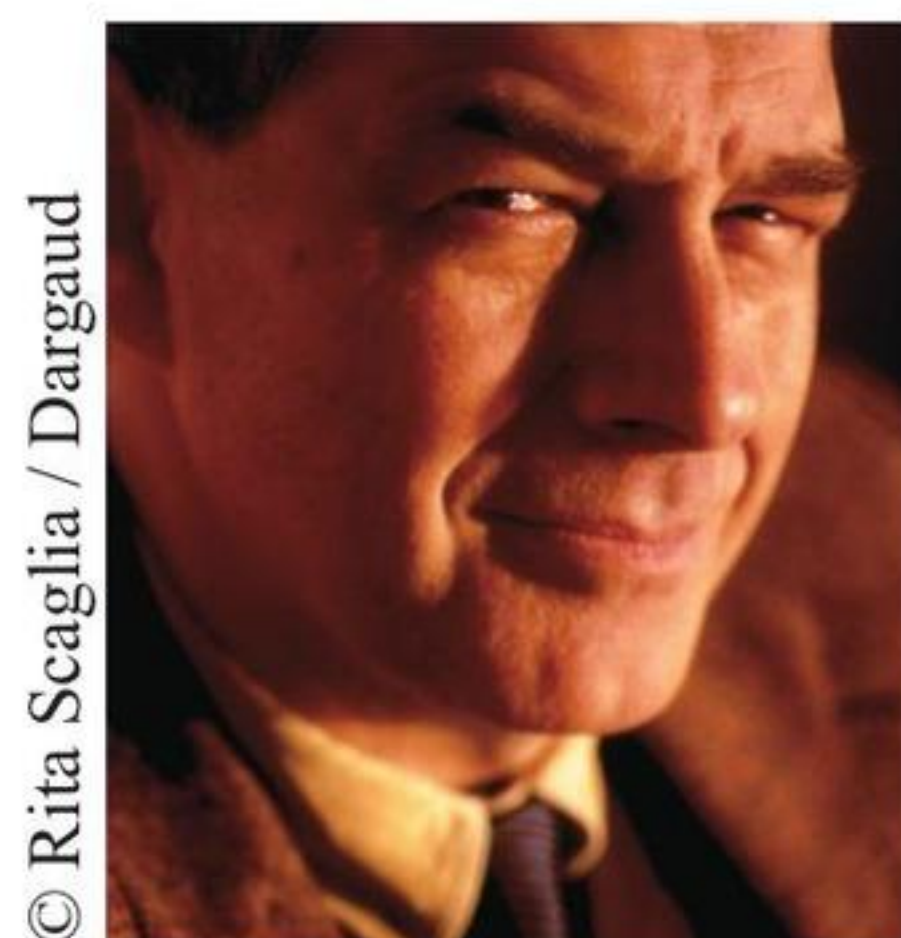
Yves Sente

André Juillard

Based on the characters of **EDGAR P. JACOBS**



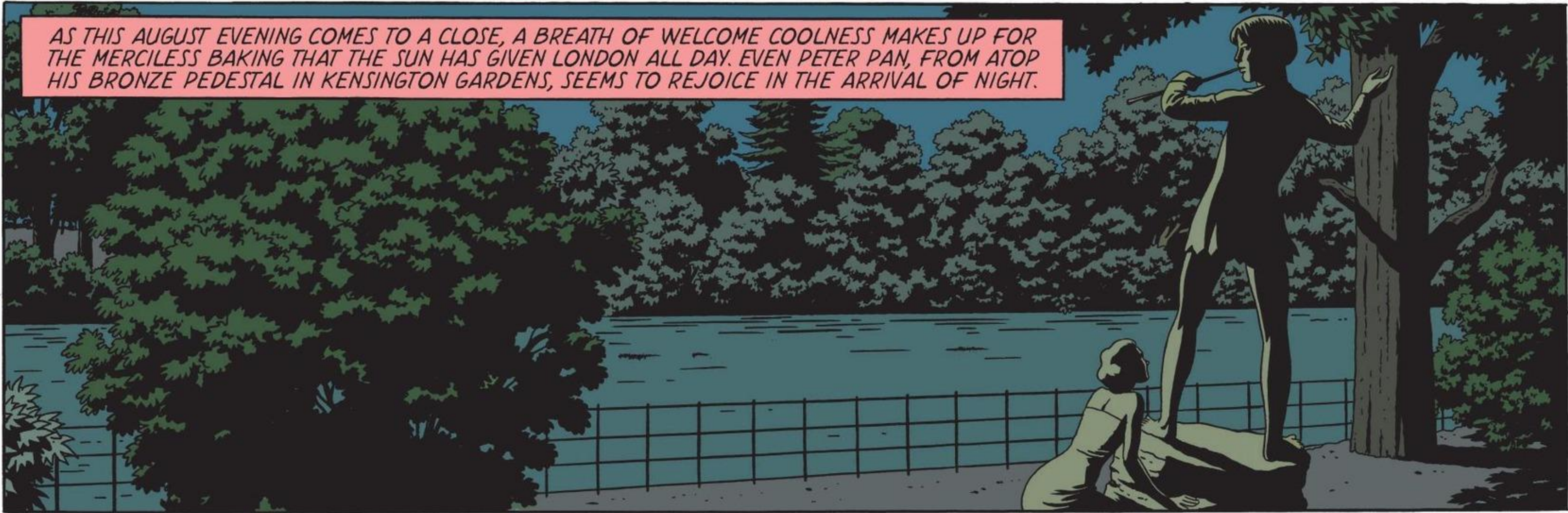
In Venice, a boating accident leads to the discovery of a 400 year old text bearing the signature 'W.S.' and promising the truth about the 'Shakespeare mystery'. That very night, someone tries unsuccessfully to steal the precious document. The discoverer, Marquis Stefano Da Spiri, decides to send a copy of the document to a specialist of the Bard in London for stylistic authentication. As for the original, he entrusts it to an old comrade in arms from WW2: Captain Francis Blake...



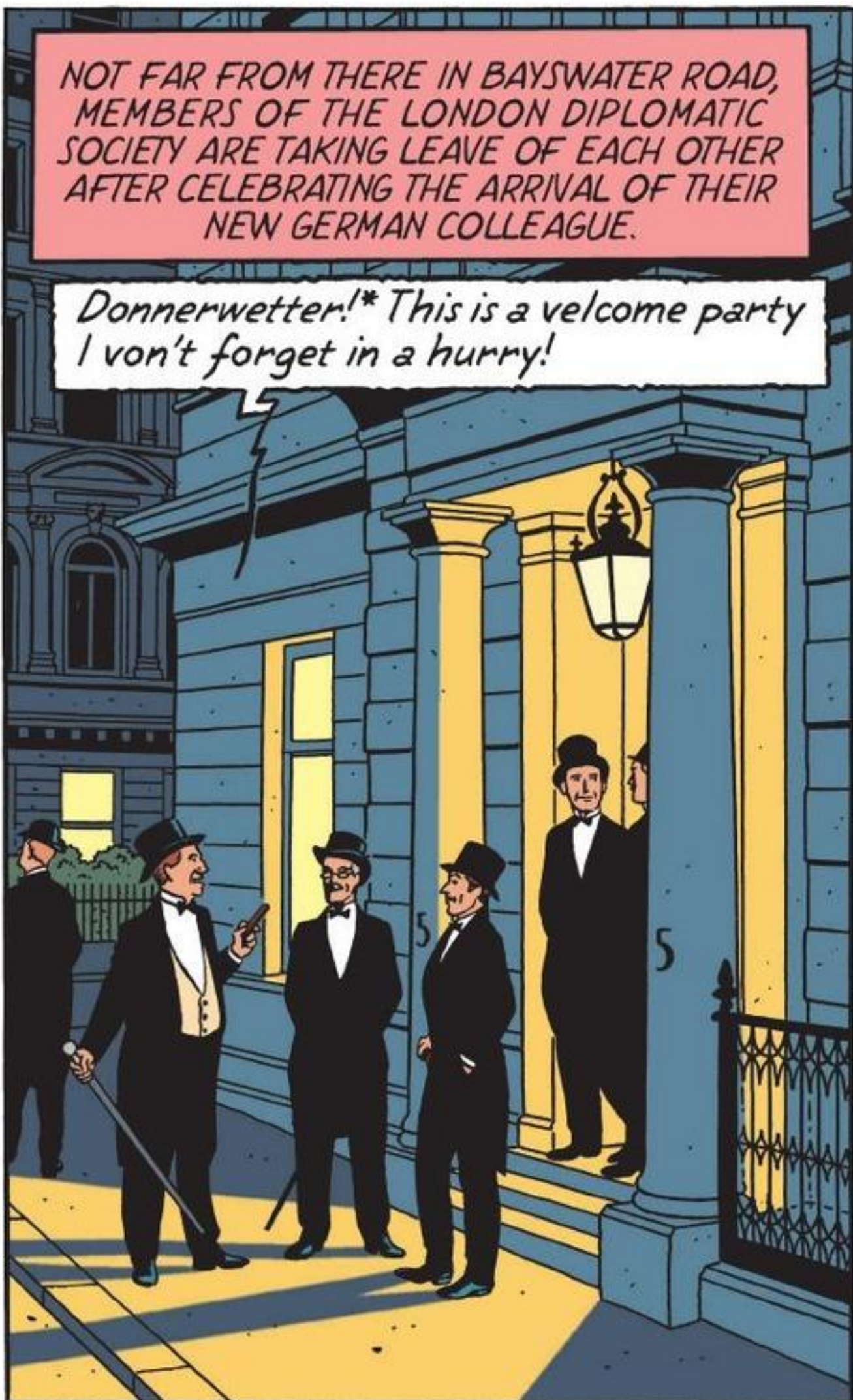
André Juillard is a celebrated artist with a career spanning more than 35 years. He has worked on famous series such as "Les Sept Vies de L'Epervier" and "Masquerouge." In 1996, he was awarded the Grand Prix at the Angoulême festival.

Yves Sente began writing scripts in 1999. He has already acquired considerable clout, being chosen as successor to **Jean Van Hamme** for the series "Thorgal" (with **Grzegorz Rosinski**) and "XIII" (with **Iouri Jigounov**), and working with **Jean Van Hamme** on "Blake & Mortimer."





AS THIS AUGUST EVENING COMES TO A CLOSE, A BREATH OF WELCOME COOLNESS MAKES UP FOR THE MERCILESS BAKING THAT THE SUN HAS GIVEN LONDON ALL DAY. EVEN PETER PAN, FROM ATOP HIS BRONZE PEDESTAL IN KENSINGTON GARDENS, SEEMS TO REJOICE IN THE ARRIVAL OF NIGHT.



NOT FAR FROM THERE IN BAYSWATER ROAD, MEMBERS OF THE LONDON DIPLOMATIC SOCIETY ARE TAKING LEAVE OF EACH OTHER AFTER CELEBRATING THE ARRIVAL OF THEIR NEW GERMAN COLLEAGUE.

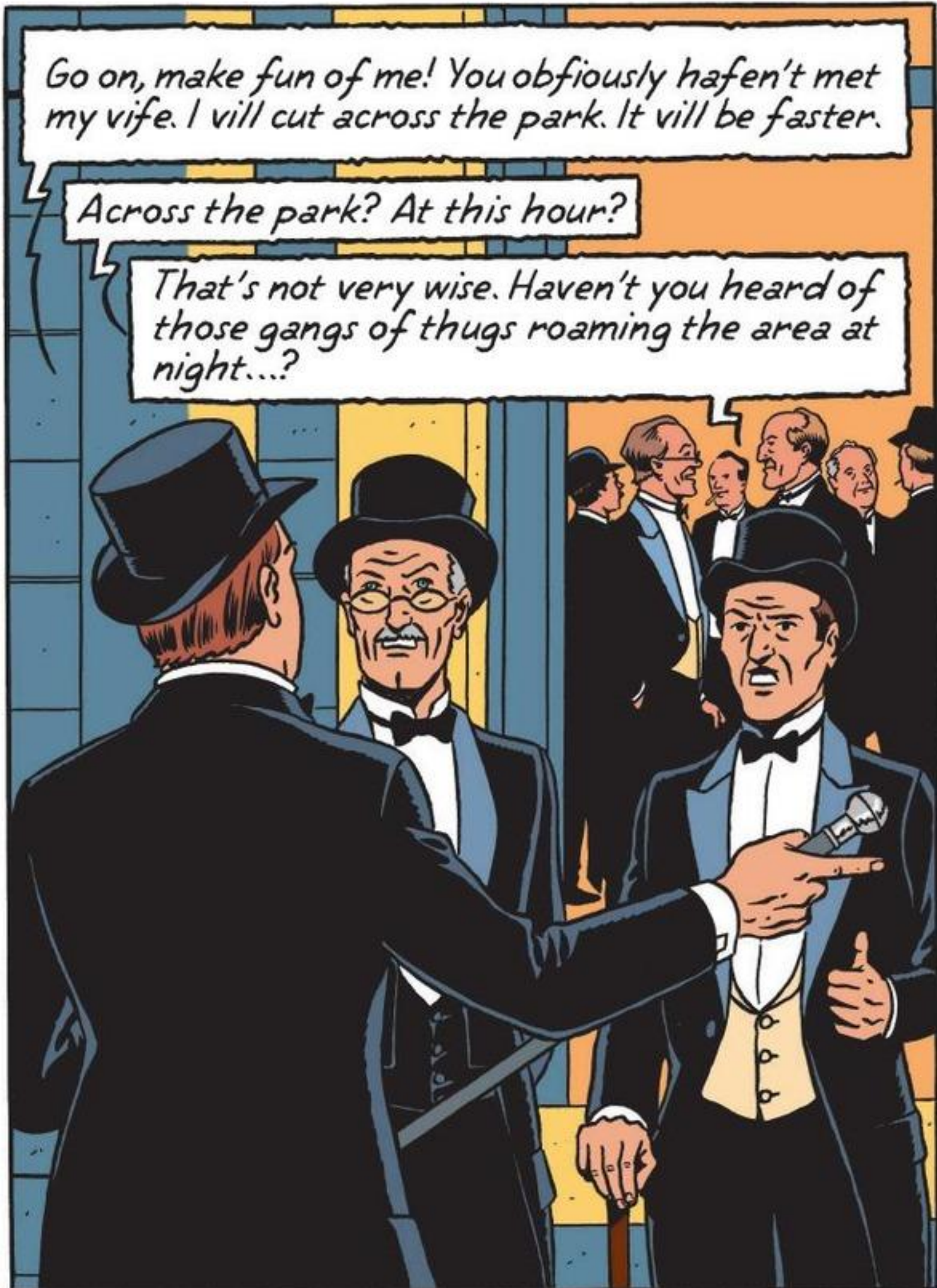
Donnerwetter! * This is a velcome party I von't forget in a hurry!



I did not realise how late it vas! I am goink to get a good ... a good... Ach! How do you say...?

It's 'a good telling-off', Hans.

My poor friend! Has the much-vaunted German authority fallen so low, then?



Go on, make fun of me! You obfiously hafent met my vife. I vill cut across the park. It vill be faster.

Across the park? At this hour?

That's not very wise. Haven't you heard of those gangs of thugs roaming the area at night...?

*BY THUNDER!



Was? * Do you mean those ... those... Ach! Vat are they called again? I definitely drank too much, my friends...

They're called 'Teddy boys'. Idle hoodlums with no respect for anyone or anything. You should be careful.



Pff! A handful of scally-vags dressed like girls aren't goink to scare me more than my vife! Let them come!



♪ Pom Pom Pom ♪

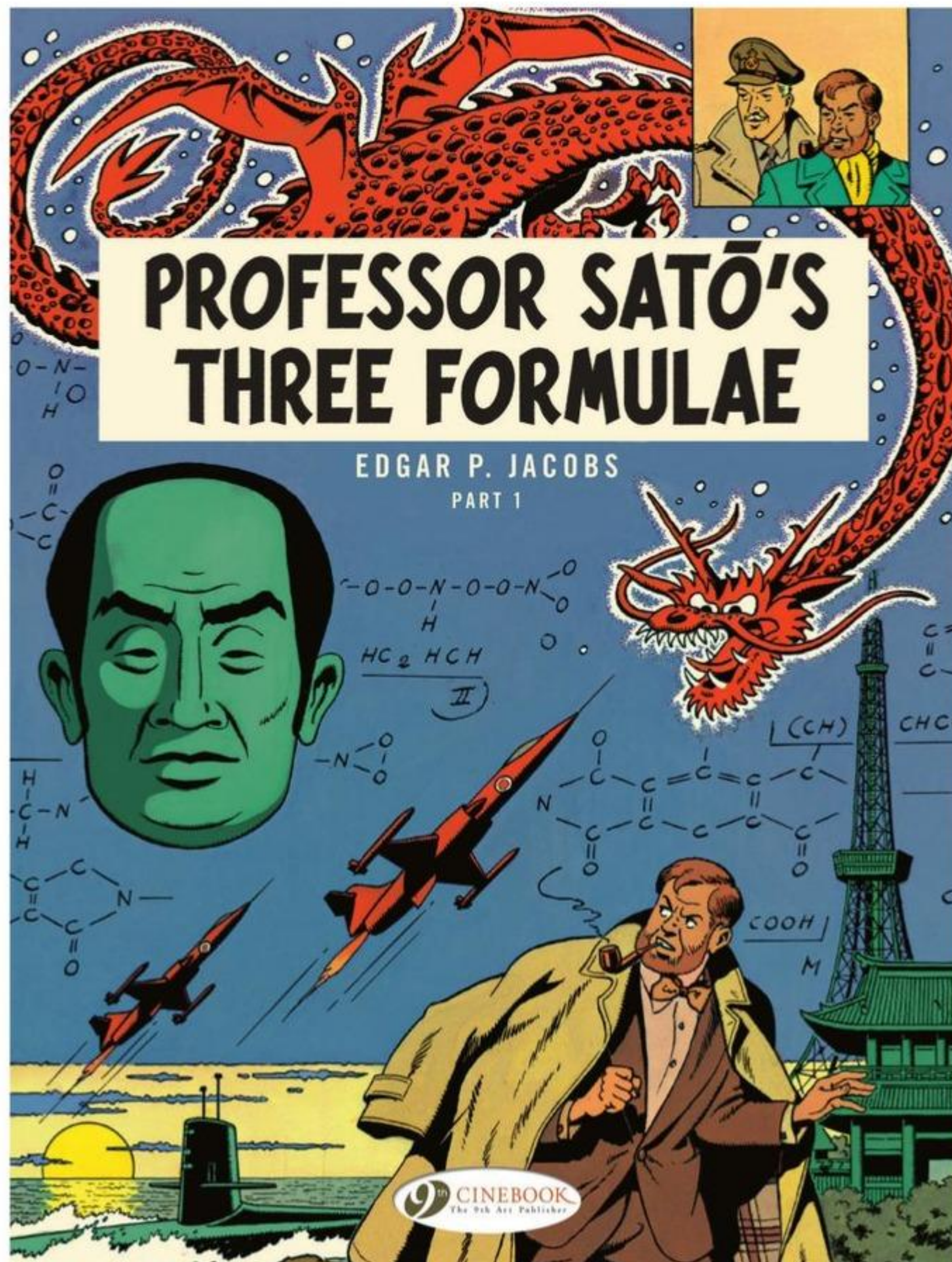


Hello there, daddy-o! Are you lost? We'll be nice and show you the way out ... for the contents of your wallet. And your hat - I like that too...

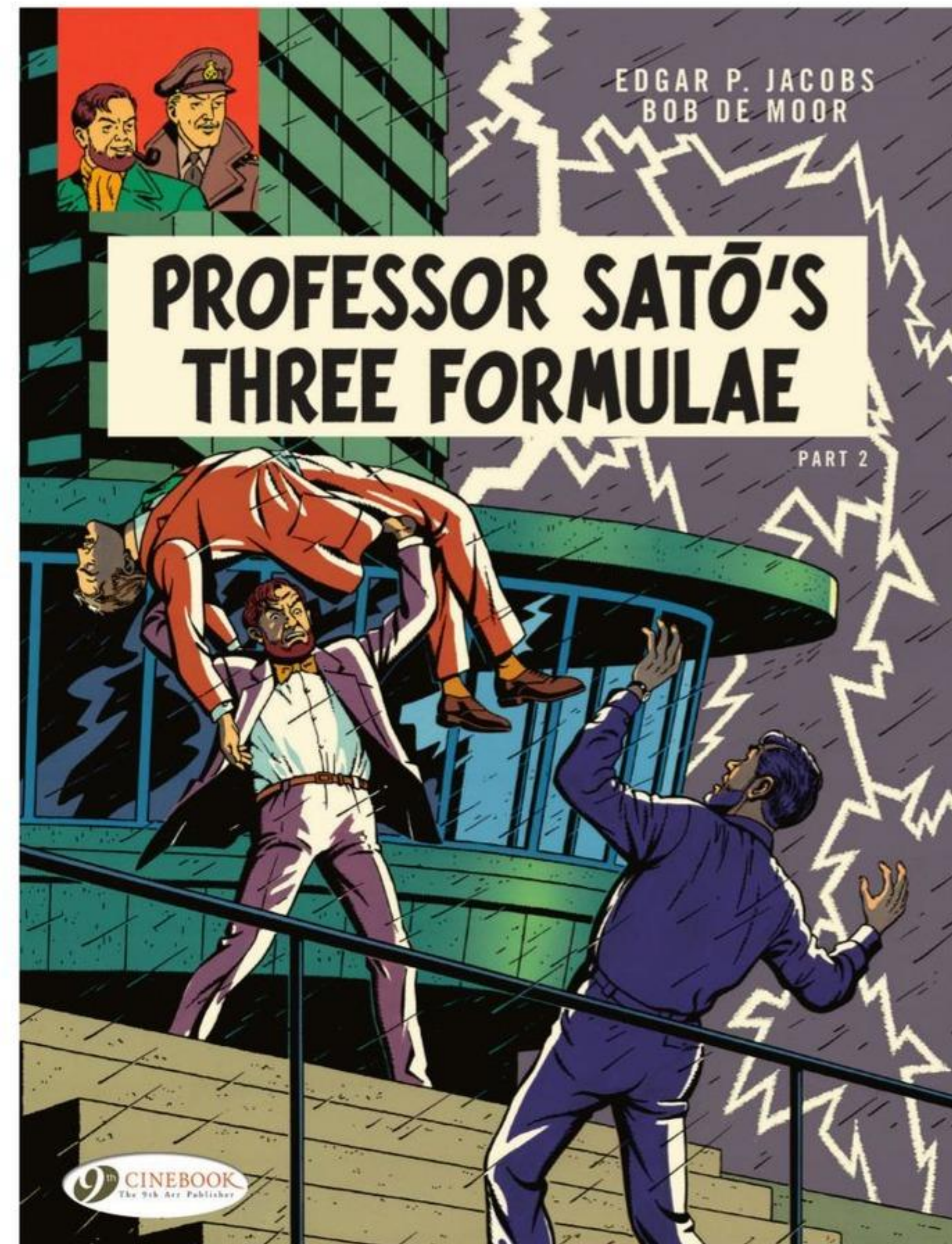
*WHAT?



PROFESSOR SATŌ'S THREE FORMULAE



Professor Satō's Three Formulae Part 1

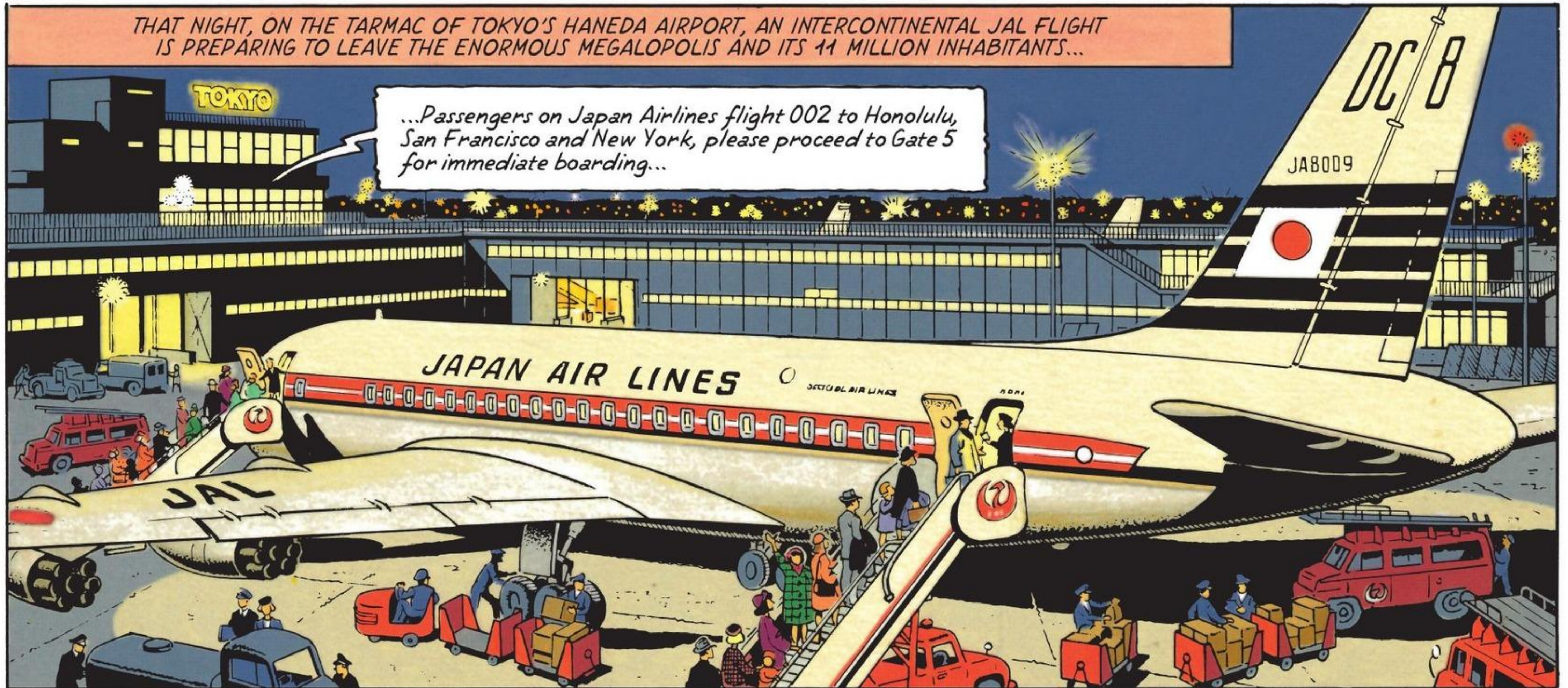


Professor Satō's Three Formulae Part 2

TIME FOR CAPTAIN BLAKE TO ENTER THE SCENE AND FACE ... ROBO-MORTIMER!

One evening in Tokyo, air traffic controllers detect an unknown flying object and send two aircraft to intercept and identify it. However, the fighters' last message before they crash into each other is 'ryū' — dragon! The whole business has deeply upset Professor Satō Akira, and he turns to his friend Mortimer, who can always be counted upon for good advice. But before he's even received the invitation, Mortimer is already targeted by men hell bent on getting rid of him...

THAT NIGHT, ON THE TARMAC OF TOKYO'S HANEDA AIRPORT, AN INTERCONTINENTAL JAL FLIGHT IS PREPARING TO LEAVE THE ENORMOUS MEGALOPOLIS AND ITS 11 MILLION INHABITANTS...



...Passengers on Japan Airlines flight 002 to Honolulu, San Francisco and New York, please proceed to Gate 5 for immediate boarding...

JAL 002, this is control tower... You are cleared to taxi to runway 33... QNH* 1020 millibars... wind 300 degrees, 13 knots. Out!



That just leaves the Air France... Ah! There it is!

*CODE FOR 'BAROMETRIC PRESSURE ADJUSTED TO SEA LEVEL' - ALTIMETER SETTING

Tokyo tower, this is AF 117 from Paris... Passing Oshima at 10,000 feet... Heading 058... Requesting instructions... Over!

This is Tokyo tower... You're number one for runway 33... Descend to 3,000 feet and prepare for final approach... Call back at outer beacon... QNH 1020 millibars... Wind 300 degrees, 13 knots... Out!



Phew! Ten more minutes and we're done for the night!



BUT SUDDENLY...

Look!... What is that?



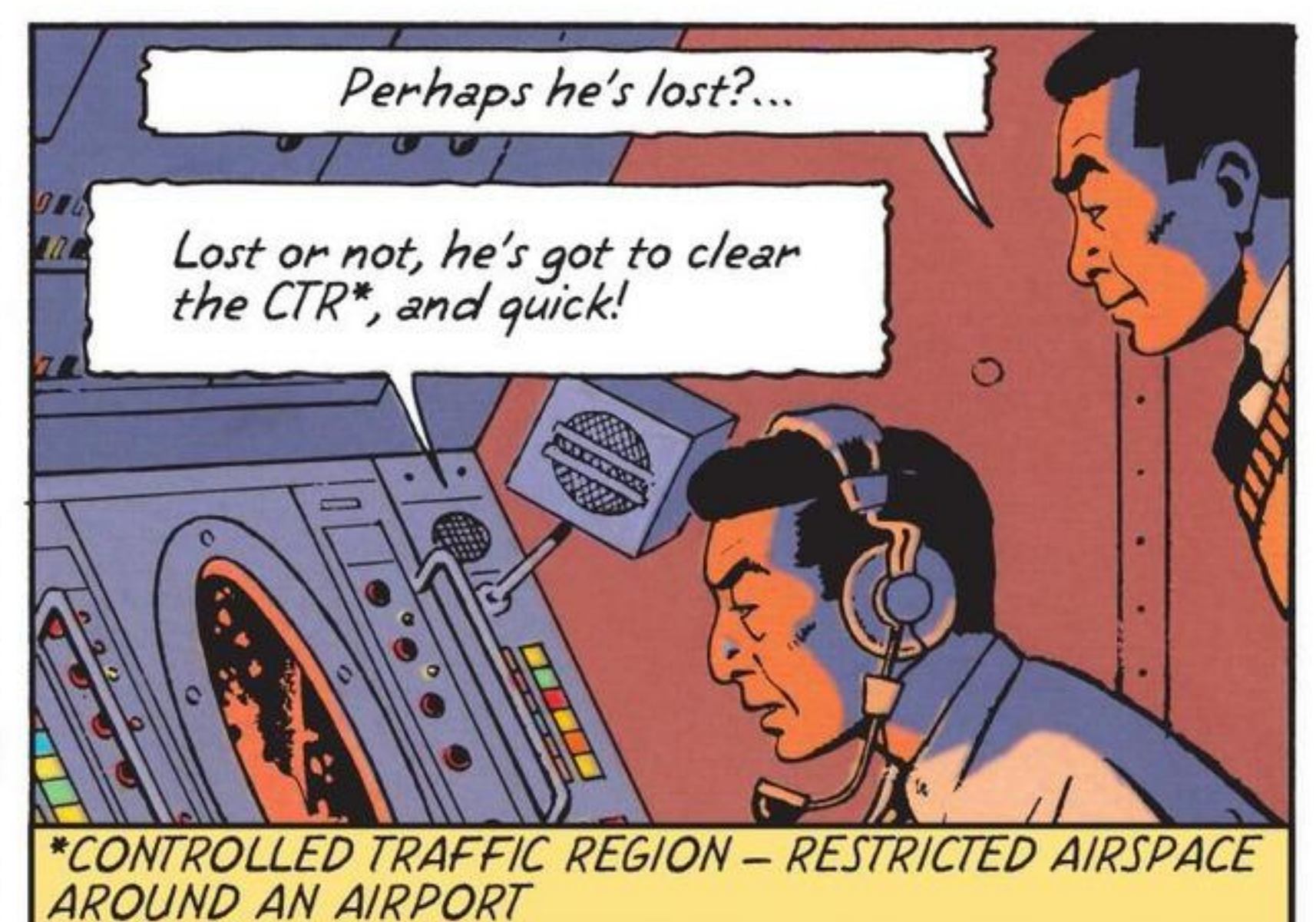
A CURIOUS BLIP HAS JUST APPEARED ON THE RADAR SCREEN...

Another plane?... We weren't expecting any arrivals on that bearing!



Perhaps he's lost?...

Lost or not, he's got to clear the CTR*, and quick!



*CONTROLLED TRAFFIC REGION - RESTRICTED AIRSPACE AROUND AN AIRPORT

Koji, stop 002 from taking off. I'll try to contact that fool...

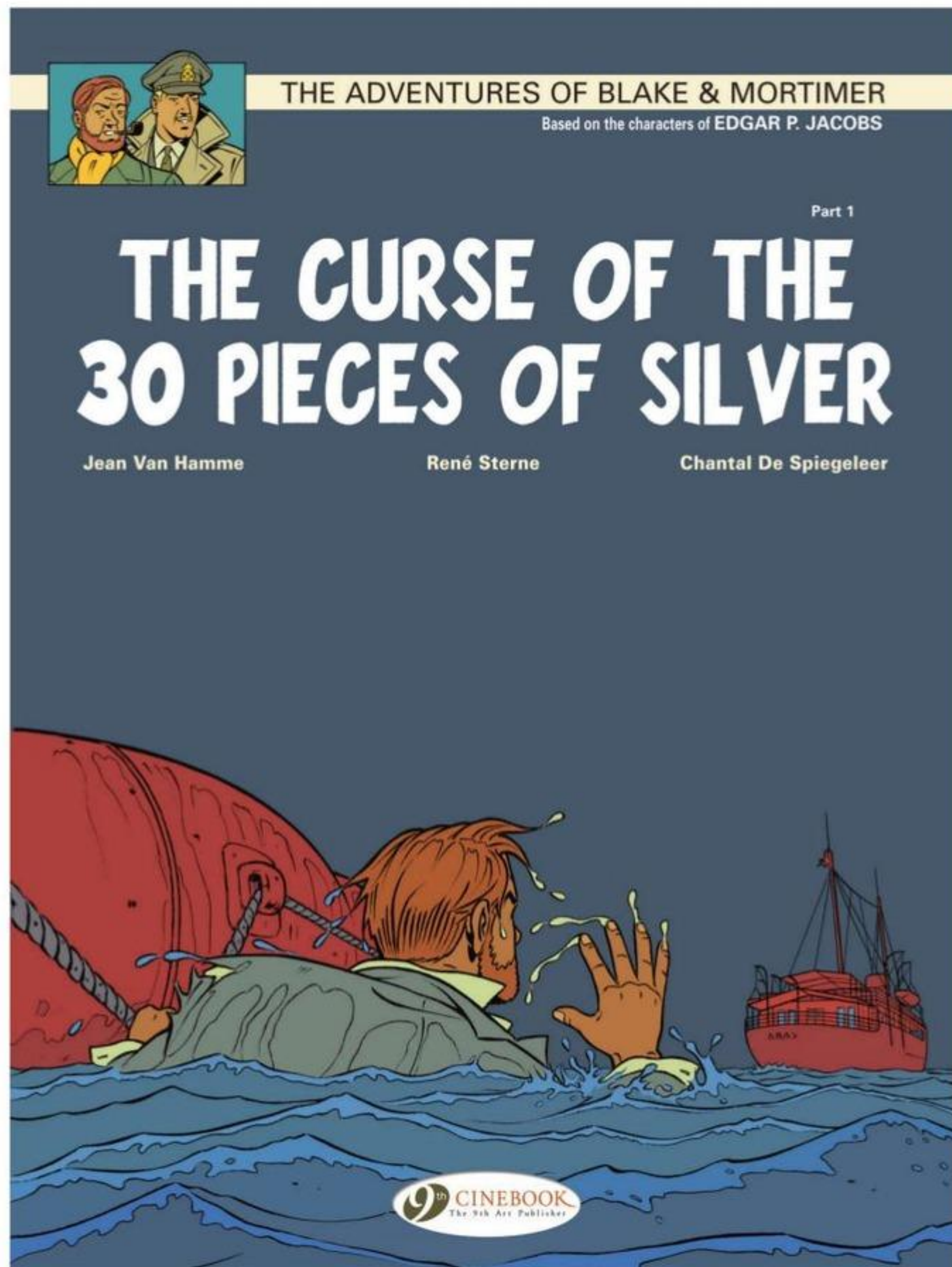
Hai!*



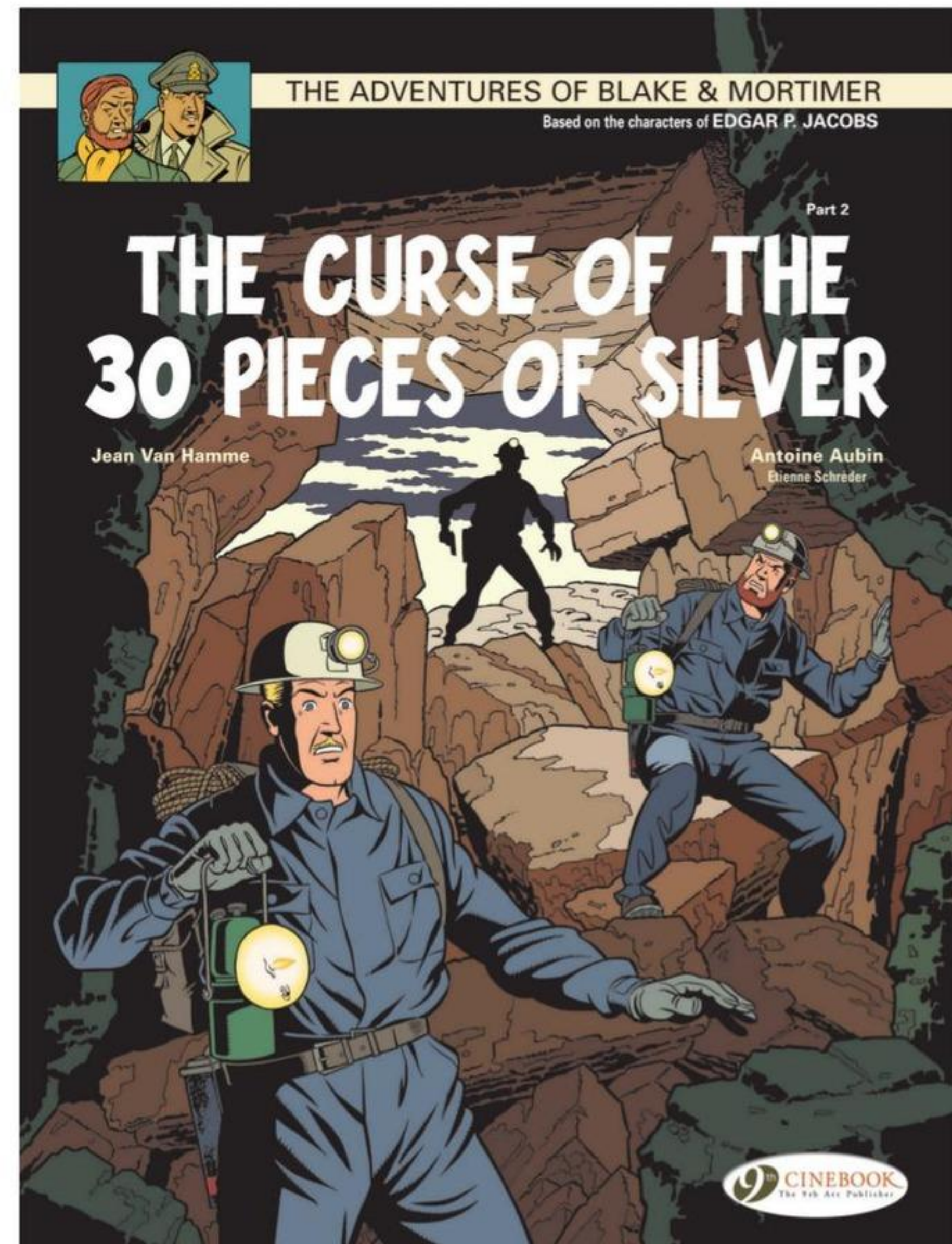
*YES, SIR!



THE CURSE OF THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER



The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 1



The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 2

WHEN AN ANCIENT CHRISTIAN RELIC SURFACES IN GREECE, BLAKE AND MORTIMER FACE ONE OF THEIR TOUGHEST CHALLENGES EVER!

In Pennsylvania, Olrik escapes a federal prison by helicopter after a bloody attack. With Blake forced to cut short his holidays at the news, a disappointed Mortimer turns his attention to Greece, where an earthquake has uncovered an ancient chapel. Before long, people are trying to kill Mortimer over a mysterious Roman silver coin. Could the long-lost relic be one of the 30 denarii paid to Judas for his betrayal of Jesus? And who exactly covets it so much?

THIS INCREDIBLE STORY BEGINS ON THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 26TH, WITH A RELATIVELY WEAK EARTHQUAKE (4.2 ON THE RICHTER SCALE) THAT SHAKES, YET AGAIN, THE SEISMICALLY ACTIVE MANI PENINSULA, AT THE SOUTHERN TIP OF THE PELOPONNESE.



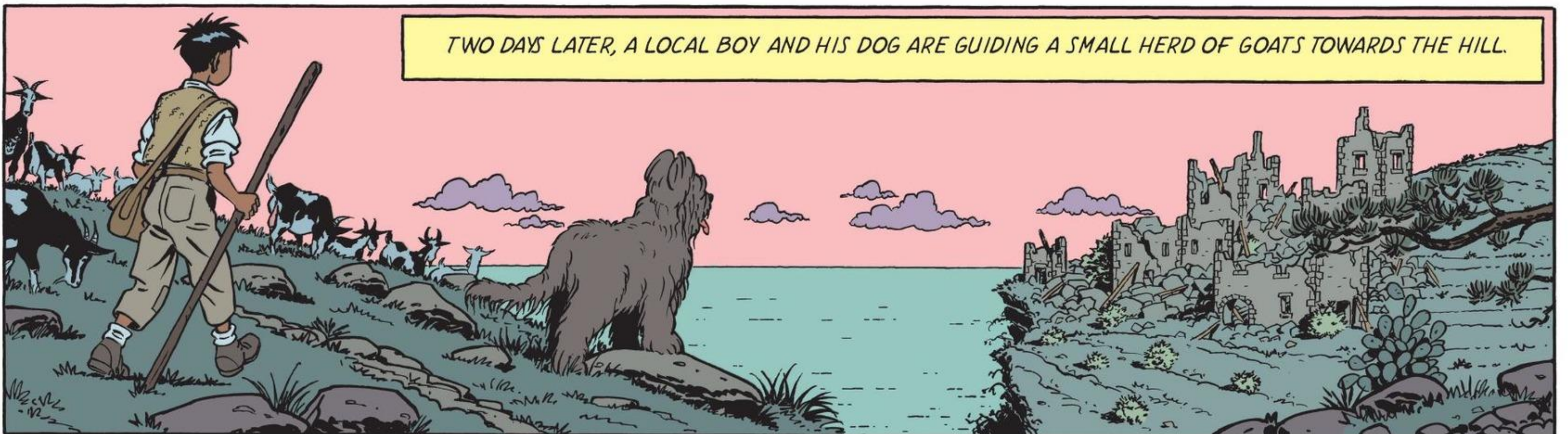
AS THE AREA IS SPARSELY POPULATED, THERE IS ONLY SLIGHT MATERIAL DAMAGE, AND NO LOSS OF LIFE TO DEPLORE.



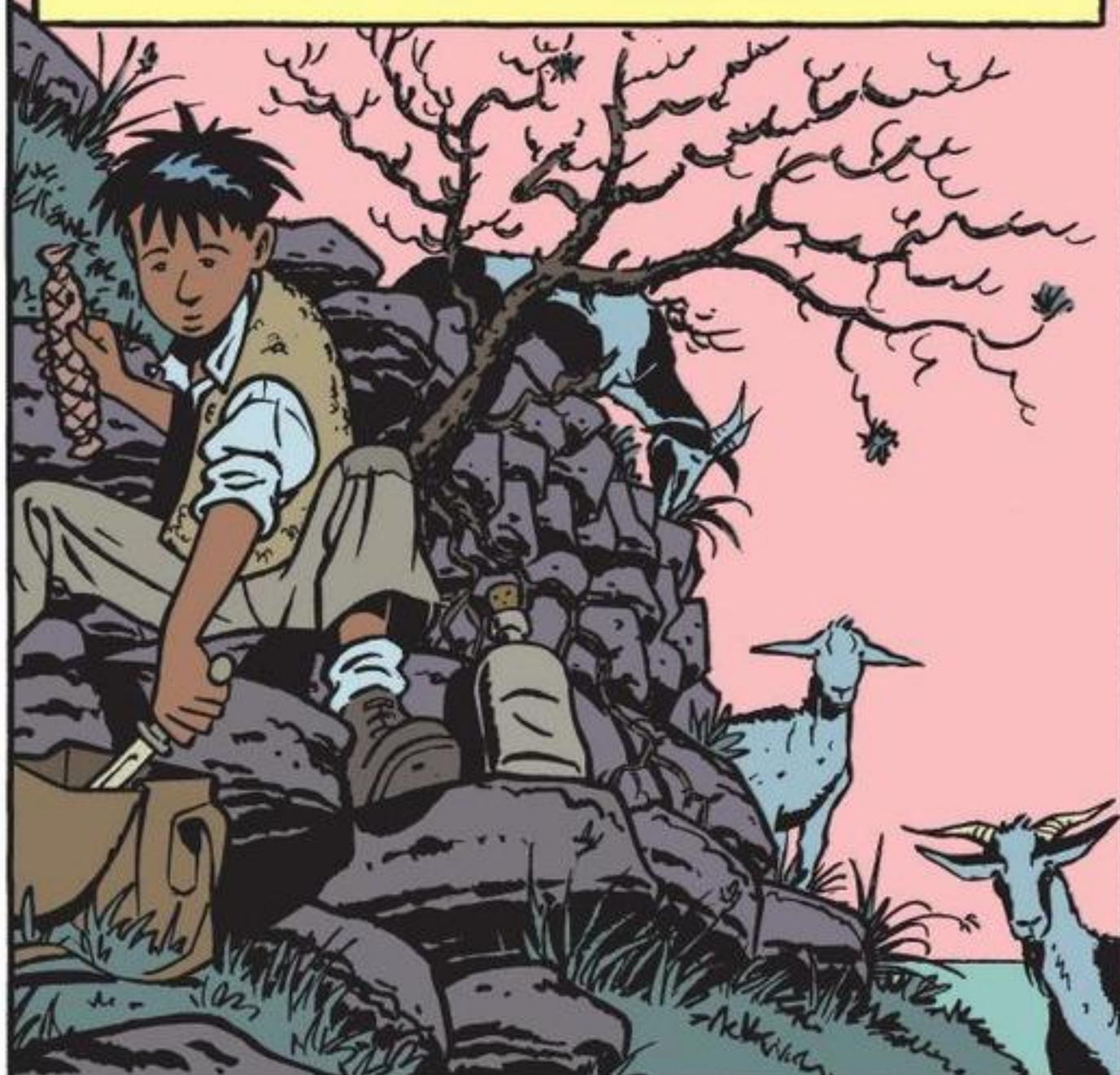
BUT A LANDSLIDE CARRIES OFF THE SIDE OF A HILL, AND, WITH IT, WHAT WAS LEFT OF AN ANCIENT RUINED VILLAGE.



TWO DAYS LATER, A LOCAL BOY AND HIS DOG ARE GUIDING A SMALL HERD OF GOATS TOWARDS THE HILL.

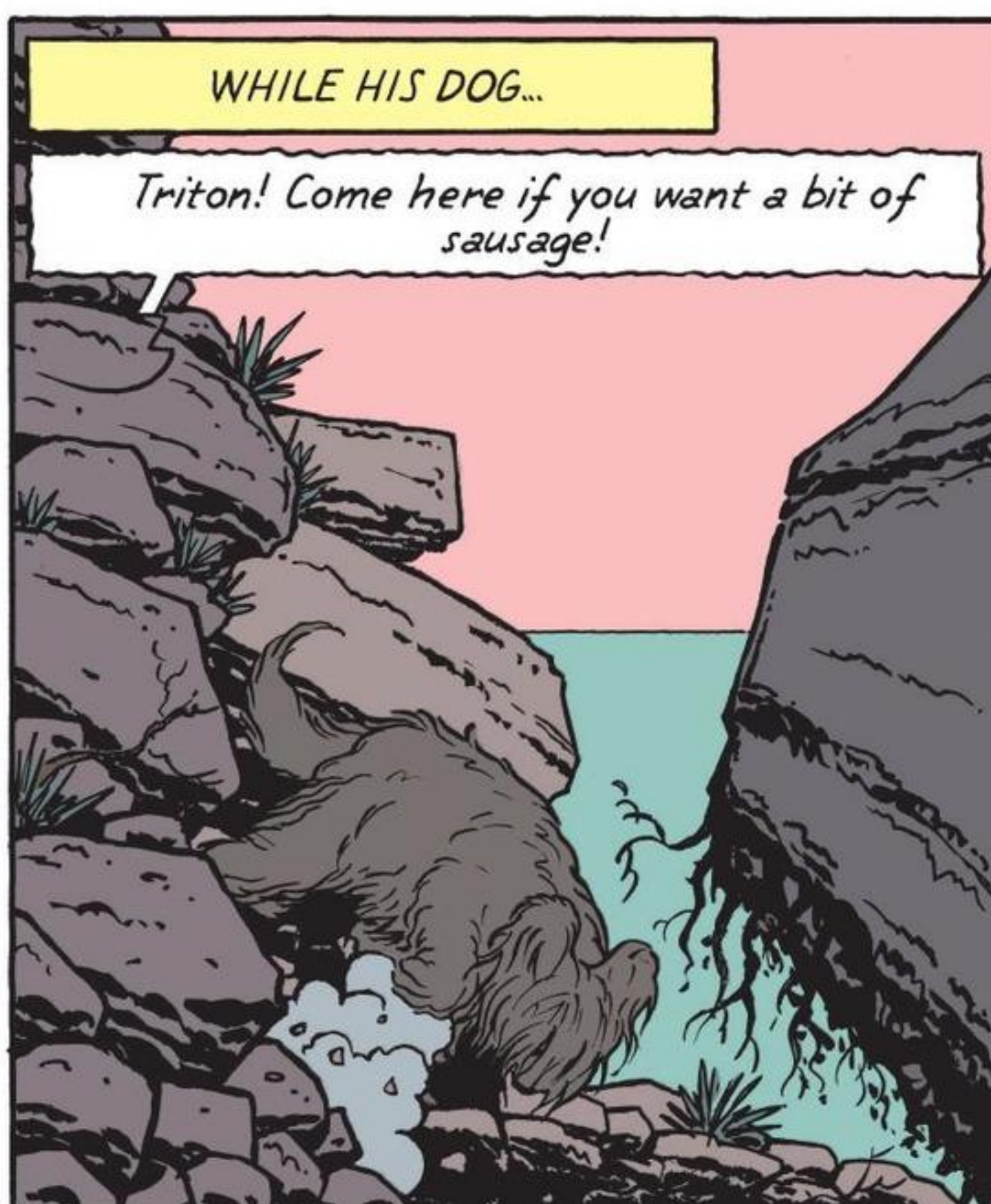


HAVING TAKEN STOCK, WITH LITTLE EMOTION, OF THE CHANGES IN THE LANDSCAPE CAUSED BY THE EARTHQUAKE, THE GOATHERD FINDS A COSY SPOT TO HAVE A BITE.



WHILE HIS DOG...

Triton! Come here if you want a bit of sausage!



WOOFF...

TRITON?!?...



Edgard Félix Pierre Jacobs (1904–1987), better known under his pen name Edgar P. Jacobs, was a comic book creator (writer and artist), born in Brussels, Belgium. It has been said of Jacobs that he didn't remember a time when he hadn't drawn.

Jacobs assisted fellow Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) in the recasting of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tintin in America*, *King Ottokar's Sceptre* and *The Blue Lotus* for book publication. He also contributed directly to both the drawing and storylines for the Tintin double-albums *The Secret of the Unicorn/Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Seven Crystal Balls/Prisoners of the Sun*.

When the comics magazine Tintin was launched on 26th September 1946, it included Jacobs' story *Le secret de l'Espadon* (*The Secret of the Swordfish*). This story would be the first in the Blake and Mortimer series.

The characters of Captain Francis Blake, dashing head of MI5, his friend Professor Philip Mortimer, a nuclear physicist, and their sworn enemy Colonel Olrik became legendary heroes of the 9th art in the long-running series.

After Jacobs' death in 1987, Bob de Moor completed his unfinished last story. In the mid-1990s, the series was continued by the Jacobs Studios with new teams of writers and artists.



ORIGINAL FRENCH EDITION		
1	1950	Le secret de l'Espadon, T1
2	1953	Le secret de l'Espadon, T2
3	1953	Le secret de l'Espadon, T3
4	1954	Le mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T1
5	1955	Le mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T2
6	1956	La marque Jaune
7	1957	L'énigme de l'Atlantide
8	1959	S.O.S. Météores
9	1962	Le piège diabolique
10	1967	L'affaire du collier
11	1971	Les trois formules du professeur Satō, T1
12	1990	Les trois formules du professeur Satō, T2 (Jacobs/De Moor)
13	1996	L'affaire Francis Blake (Van Hamme/Benoit)
14	2000	La machination Voronov (Sente/Juillard)
15	2001	L'étrange rendez-vous (Van Hamme/Benoit)
16	2003	Les sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T1 (Sente/Juillard)
17	2004	Les sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T2 (Sente/Juillard)
18	2008	Le sanctuaire du Gondwana (Sente/Juillard)
19	2009	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T1 (Van Hamme/Sterne/De Spiegeleer)
20	2010	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T2 (Van Hamme/Aubin)
21	2012	Le serment des cinq Lords (Sente/Juillard)
22	2013	L'onde Septimus (Dufaux/Aubin/Schröder)
23	2014	Le bâton de Plutarque (Sente/Juillard)
24	2016	Le Testament de William S. (Sente/Juillard)
25	2018	La Vallée des Immortels, T1 (Sente/Berserik/Van Dongen)
26	2019	La Vallée des Immortels, T2 (Sente/Berserik/Van Dongen)

CINEBOOK EDITION		
15	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 1
16	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 2
17	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 3
2	2007	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 1
3	2008	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 2
1	2007	The Yellow "M"
12	2012	Atlantis Mystery
6	2009	S.O.S. Meteors
19	2014	The Time Trap
7	2010	The Affair of the Necklace
22	2016	Professor Satō's Three Formulae, Part 1
23	2016	Professor Satō's Three Formulae, Part 2
4	2008	The Francis Blake Affair
8	2010	The Voronov Plot
5	2009	The Strange Encounter
9	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 1
10	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 2
11	2011	The Gondwana Shrine
13	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 1
14	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 2
18	2014	The Oath of the Five Lords
20	2015	The Septimus Wave
21	2015	Plutarch's Staff
24	2016	The Testament of William S.
25	2018	The Valley of the Immortals, Part 1
26	2019	The Valley of the Immortals, Part 2



LYNX-EMPIRE